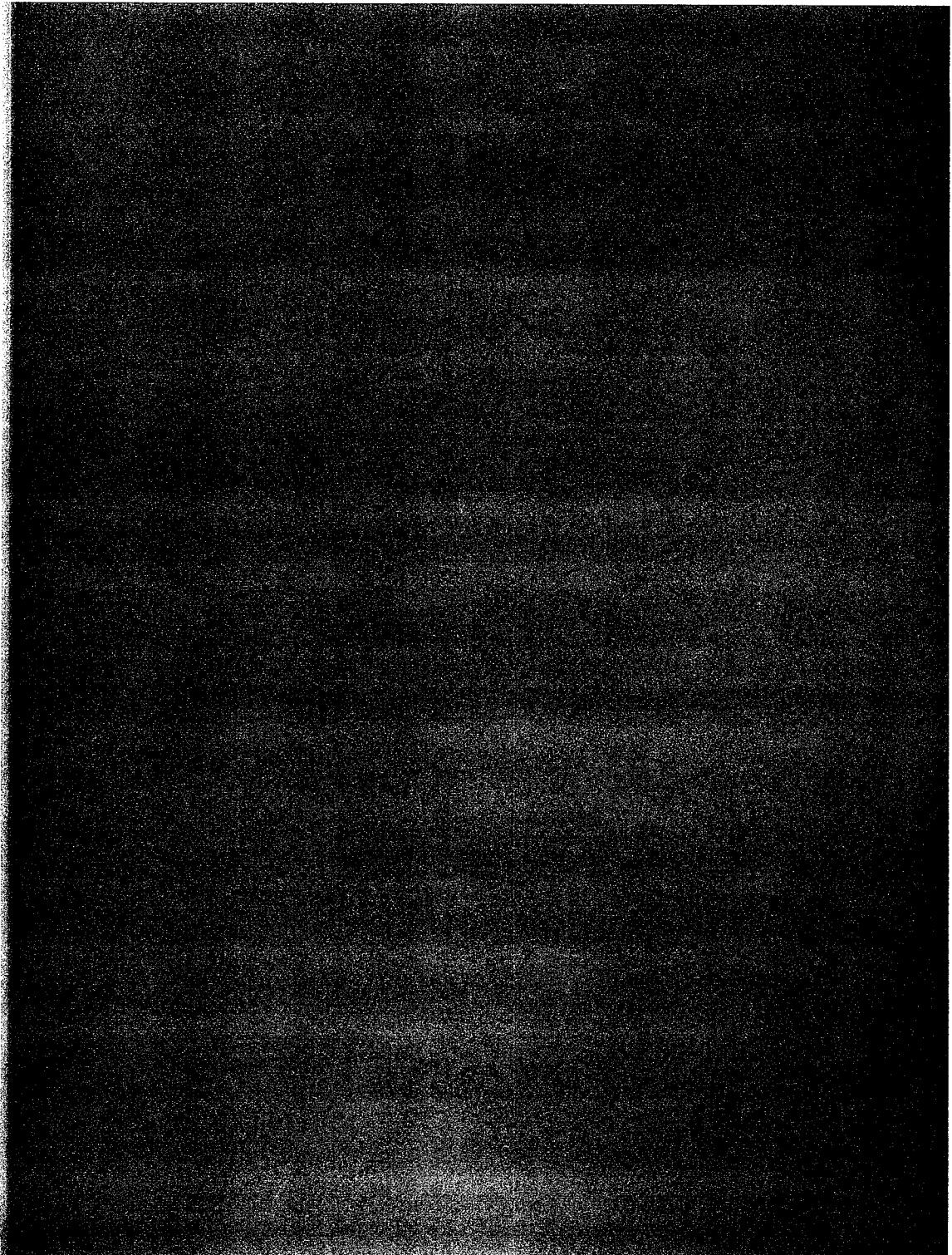


# Wasatch Review

International

Volume 4

1996



Volume 4      1996

Editor:               Tory C. Anderson

Associate Editors:   Valerie Holladay, Julia Konopasek, Kaydean  
McInnis, Kent Wallace, Henry Miles

Cover Picture:       Bruce Davidson, 1963. Girl playing in grave-  
yard in a Welsh mining town.

The *Wasatch Review International* is an annual literary journal dedicated to creative writing. Contributions from authors of any religion are welcome. Manuscripts (short stories, poetry, personal essays, dramas, book reviews) must in some way explore the Mormon culture. Our aim is fine literature—not religious politics—and manuscripts should not be written to prove or disprove Church policies or doctrines.

Manuscripts should not exceed eight thousand words. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and preferably be available on floppy disk (WordPerfect, MicroSoft Word, DOS text file). Each manuscript should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Send manuscripts to *Wasatch Review International*, P.O. Box 1017, Orem, UT 84059. Those whose manuscripts are published will receive one contributor's copy.

#### Subscribers Notice

Subscription is \$7.00 for one year and \$13.00 for two years. Single issues are \$8.00. All subscriptions begin with current issue unless otherwise requested. Send subscriptions to *Wasatch Review International*, P.O. Box 1017, Orem UT 84059.

©1996 by *Wasatch Review International*  
All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America  
ISSN: 1072-737X

Opinions expressed by the authors in the *Wasatch Review International* are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## Contents

### Short Stories

Missionary Rules . . . . .	1
<i>Tory C. Anderson</i>	
Cub River . . . . .	53
<i>Paul Rawlins</i>	

### Novel Excerpt

Jonah: Sailing to Tarshish . . . . .	29
<i>Benson Y. Parkinson</i>	

### Essays

Somebody's Mother . . . . .	19
<i>Teresa Holladay</i>	
Heritage of Hostility: The Mormon Attack on Fiction in the 19th Century . . . . .	75
<i>B. W. Jorgensen</i>	
Roughly One of the R's: Some Notes . . . . . of a BYU Fiction Teacher . . . . .	95
<i>B.W. Jorgensen</i>	

### Poetry

Tell Me Tomorrow . . . . .	71
<i>E. Leon Chidester</i>	
Job in Winter . . . . .	50
<i>E. Leon Chidester</i>	
Slow Dance No. 1084 . . . . .	112
<i>Sharlee Mullins Glenn</i>	

### Book Reviews

All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir . . . . .	112
<i>Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Emma Lou Thayne</i>	
<i>Reviewed by Julea Z. Konopasek</i>	
Statehood . . . . .	112
<i>Marilyn Brown</i>	
<i>Reviewed by Julia Z. Konopasek</i>	
Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape . . . . .	113
<i>Terry Tempest Williams</i>	
<i>Reviewed by Kaydean McInnis</i>	

# **Missionary Rules**

**Tory C. Anderson**

My Uncle Wiley told me two years on a mission is worth a lifetime of guilt. He also told me that if I wasn't having fun on my mission I was doing it all wrong. I figure I must be doing it all wrong: I got the lifetime of guilt in one year and I haven't had any fun at all. It's been eleven months since I last baptized. That says it all right there. In the North Carolina, Charlotte Mission, good missionaries baptize monthly. It's a proven statistic. The last letter from the A.P.s discussed this. They printed a graph showing how missionaries who break less than five rules a week baptize on the average of 3.5 persons a month. Those who break more

---

Tory C. Anderson spends his days writing technical manuals and teaching training classes on computer telephony equipment. He spends his evenings with his wife Barbara and their four sons, Tory, Cory, Rory, and Jory (Jory is still on the way—Tory thinks he's going to be a son), reading books and playing computer games.

than ten rules a week only baptize .8 persons a month, and it goes downhill from there. This information confuses me because I break less than two rules a week but I don't baptize anybody a month.

I know there is more to success than just keeping the rules. It takes hard work too. Who was it that said, "Pray as if everything depended on the Lord and then work as if everything depended on you"? I believe that's a true statement, but sometimes I can't help thinking it gives the Lord the credit if you succeed and you the credit if you fail—didn't work hard enough or didn't have enough faith. Anyway, I make sure we work hard. We are on the street at 9:30 a.m., not a second later, even if it means running down the steps and throwing ourselves out the door. We spend no more than an hour for lunch and dinner and no more than twenty minutes in a member's home. If they won't turn off the TV we leave right away. We can spend an hour in a member's home for dinner, but the time starts from when we enter the home, not from when dinner starts. So if dinner isn't on the table we leave and tract until it is so that we can have more time to eat. There are no movies and not even any music except for a few mission-approved tapes. "Obedience is the first law of heaven." President Smith reminds us of that at every zone conference. "If you obey the Lord, he has to bless you." Of course, on a mission, counting your blessings means counting your baptisms. That's not written in the missionary rule book, but it's understood.

I'm obedient, but there are no blessings. The guilt is devastating. My first companion, Elder Zoe, kept the rules, had faith, and knew what he was doing. He was an ex-zone leader put out to pasture. It was one month until he went home. They removed him from his zone leader position that last month to calm him down before he left the service. They

## M I S S I O N A R Y R U L E S

did that to all the good zone leaders. He worked me until I dropped and every time we broke a rule he would yell, "We're going to hell, Elder Wilde." We baptized eight people during our month together.

Since Elder Zoe left, I haven't done much good. I think part of the problem is the companions I've been getting—the dregs of the mission. I've had the small-time companions who rebel by not getting out of bed until 7:35 a.m. and sing Van Halen lyrics while tracting to companions who write the mission president asking him to excommunicate them because they "don't believe." President Smith calls them spiritual vampires. He said he gives me these companions because I work with them so well. I don't work with them well; I just tolerate them.

A companion I had of this latter nature was a real drain. He wouldn't speak for three days at a time to me or to anybody we met. When he would break his silence we would usually be knocking on somebody's door and he would start arguing how God, if there was one, was just another form of Satan. With him, the tracting hours just flew by.

One afternoon during lunch while I was stirring up some Campbell's tomato soup, he stepped into the kitchen and, as if it were on his list of things to do today, he broke down and cried. *What now*, I thought. When I turned around he blurted out that he did believe, and that he didn't really want to go home, but that he was a sinner—he had done something with a girl—and now they'd make him go home. His confession embarrassed me. I almost didn't believe it, thinking that maybe it was a ruse to get out of the mission. But his tears. No man could make himself cry like that—humiliate himself like that—just to get out of a mission. I didn't ask any questions. It wasn't my business and I didn't care to know any more even

if it were my business. I just dialed President Smith and told him Elder Wilson needed to talk to him. President Smith talked to Elder Wilson for a long time and then he talked to me.

"We're not going to send him home, Elder Wilde. He'll stay on his mission if it's the last thing I do. I believe it's his salvation."

"Yes, sir," I said, feigning enthusiasm. I fought a sinking sensation realizing that there wouldn't be any blessings with Elder Wilson.

About 11:30 that night and for the next few nights thereafter Elder Wilson's stake president called and talked to him. Elder Wilson seemed to feel better during those days and quit talking about wanting to be excommunicated and actually gave portions of the first discussion. But it was too good to last. On the fourth day we were on our bikes at a busy intersection waiting for the light to change when Elder Wilson began sobbing loudly.

*Oh no. Not now. Not here, I thought.*

"I know they're going to send me home," he said loudly enough for me and for those in cars near us to hear.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, blushing, and giving those in the cars nearby sideways glance.

"I didn't tell them everything. What happened wasn't just with any girl, it was with my sister. I know they are going to send me home now and I don't want to go."

People stared at us from their cars. *Cheez, I thought. Couldn't you have told the truth the first time or at least waited until dinner to bring this up?* "You'll have to talk to the president tonight," I said and we tracted the rest of the day. We could have gone to the apartment right then and called, but we were

six miles away and our statistics were low. We were supposed to have knocked on seventy more doors and taught twelve more discussions than we had. I didn't want the zone leaders getting all over my case. Besides, *Working hard is a form of repentance*, President Smith had said and it sounded like Elder Wilson needed to repent.

That night President Smith called us. "How's it going, Elder Wilde!" he asked. His voice was charged with optimism and enthusiasm. He clearly thought the worst was over and that Elder Smith could be used in one of his hopeless-elder-turned-into-A.P.-material inspirational stories.

"I think he needs to talk to you again, President," I said.

"Oh," he said, suddenly sounding tired. They talked and then later that night, Elder Wilson's stake president called again as he did for the next three nights. I could hear Elder Wilson in the living room mumbling and crying. Elder Wilson was humble for the next few days, but eventually that wore off and, out of sins to give him a hope of escaping the next twenty-four months on a mission, he became surly and only a semi-believer. One morning he believed in God, the next he didn't. One day he would brag about the times he drank so much he barfed, the next day he would cry and ask my forgiveness. I couldn't stand him, but I have a high tolerance level. I had to in order to concentrate on the work.

I was with Elder Smith two months. The night before I was transferred we showed "Man's Search for Meaning" to a group of members and some of their nonmember friends. After the movie, when things were wrapping up, Elder Wilson got up and called for everyone's attention. He had a poem he wanted to read. I blushed as he read the poem and I realized it was dedicated to me. The point of the poem was to tell me he loved me, appreciated my help, and was going to miss me.

I was embarrassed that he would say such private things publicly. But what embarrassed me more was that he could feel these things toward me when I felt none of them for him; I didn't love him, I wasn't going to miss him, and I had never tried to help him as much as I just put up with him. In fact, getting transferred from him was the only joy I found in knowing him. I hoped and prayed the next companion would be someone who knew how to baptize.

I felt optimistic when I met Elder McMurphy at the bus station. He wore a winning smile and shook my hand enthusiastically. But I lost hope when, later on that first day together, Elder McMurphy crushed two aspirin on the kitchen table and then sucked the powder into his nose through a rolled dollar bill. At least he had no desire to be excommunicated as Elder Smith did. Elder McMurphy was hyperactive. His head always seemed to twitch a little—a scar from his druggie, pre-mission days. If you didn't have to live with him he came across as cute and fun-loving. He always had a stupid joke ready, usually inappropriate for a missionary, but something the members laughed at. I think it was the irresistible smile he wore when he told the joke more than the joke itself that made the members laugh. One of the Mia Maid girls came up to me after church one day and taught me a new handshake, the kind that goes through several motions—slapping palms, wrapping thumbs, and wiggling fingers. The handshake ended unmistakably in an action suggesting the passing of a joint.

"Where did you learn that?" I asked.

"Elder McMurphy," she said, and she ran off giggling. It bothered me that it was these kinds of things, the things that made him a missionary that members wouldn't trust their

nonmember friends with, that made them like him. I worked hard at being a professional, at convincing the members they had a capable ally in me and that they could bring their nonmember friends to me without fear or embarrassment. The members treated me with respect, but they still liked Elder McMurphy too. I felt betrayed.

Elder McMurphy didn't like me. He tried his smiles and jokes on me but I didn't laugh. I saw through him, that he wasn't a good missionary, and that made him angry. When he saw he couldn't make me laugh he tried to make me mad. He said things and even threw things at me and then watched me closely to see what I would do. But I gave him no satisfaction. I ignored him and continued on with the work. Sometimes I could see tears in his eyes and feel hate coming from him. The hate troubled me. I had done nothing to deserve such hate. I just wanted to baptize and I wanted a companion who would help. "Please Lord," I prayed. "Have mercy on me." But transfers came and went and Elder McMurphy stayed.

One day, across the street from our apartment, we found a *Gallery* magazine in the gutter. I had never heard of *Gallery* before, but the cover made apparent its pornographic content. We both swallowed hard and took a deep breath. I threw the magazine so far back into a tangle of brambles that a grizzly bear wouldn't venture into, thinking that ought to keep us both safe. A week later I found the *Gallery* magazine in his closet. I don't know what I was doing in his closet, inspiration maybe, but there it was. I thumbed through it quickly, unable to help myself and broke out into a sweat. The guilt of having seen what I saw, the guilt of not having the power not to look in the first place burned in my stomach. But Elder McMurphy didn't know I had looked.

I stepped out of the closet with the magazine. "Elder McMurphy," I said. He turned, saw the magazine, looked startled, and then looked down at the floor. Being a fellow male I didn't need to ask him *why* he had picked the magazine up, but I was interested in how he got through the tangles of thorns, and when.

"I got it when we were gathering pecans across the street the other day and you went in with a load."

"How?" I asked.

"It wasn't as hard as it looked," he said.

It was difficult trying to decide what to do with the magazine. There was no trash can in the city where it would be safe from us, or rather Elder McMurphy. We couldn't burn it, there being no appropriate place for a fire. We ended up tearing it into little pieces while we stared at each other to keep us from looking at the pictures. We scattered the pieces among three different garbage cans on the block.

The magazine had done its damage though. I awoke suddenly that night—inspiration I think—and found Elder McMurphy's bed empty. I looked toward the bathroom and saw that it was empty also. It was 12:30 a.m. I walked down the hallway and opened the door to the extra bedroom and found Elder McMurphy laying on his stomach on the bed with his garments pulled down and his hands beneath his groin. I, stunned and embarrassed, quickly shut the door, but not before he saw me. Too sick to think of doing anything else, I went back to my bed. A few moments later Elder McMurphy went to his.

"Pretty gross, huh," he said, contrition and melancholy in his voice.

"Yeah," I mumbled and turned my back.

The next morning I showered and dressed early, not wanting to see Elder McMurphy when he woke up. When I came back into the room he was dressed already and looking pale. He wore one of his smiles as he looked toward me, though not at me. It was the smile one wears when one has been caught in the act of anything disreputable and has no excuse. His sins had clearly given me power over him.

"What do I do?" he asked.

"I guess you call the president," I answered.

In spite of the early hour, he went to the phone and dialed. We both knew he had committed a grave sin and it needed to be resolved. I stayed far in the background to give him privacy. He was only on the phone two minutes before he hung up and turned around, eyes on the floor.

"What did he say?" I asked. I thought maybe we were to travel to Charlotte so that he could confess in person, or maybe he was to call his stake president as did Elder Wilson.

"He said to go out and work twice as hard today. That's all." He let out three tremendous sobs before he got control of himself. I think I understood. To commit such a sin, to confess it, and as a result to be told only to go out and work twice as hard? It seemed a foolish humiliation to confess in the first place. Maybe President Smith was having an off day. Of course that was President Smith's answer to temptation—if you worked twice as hard when the devil tempted you, it taught him to leave you alone.

We did go out and work hard, but very ineffectually. I felt the weight of my weakness pulling me down. I felt the weight of my companion's weakness pulling me down.

After a few days the weight of the situation eased. Elder McMurphy was back to his light-hearted ways. The members

loved him and respected me. I tolerated him and he hated me. He became irritated at me easily. I did nothing on purpose to irritate him. I just followed the rules and worked hard.

Yesterday Elder McMurphy pulled the ultimate shenanigan. I haven't told anybody yet. It seems clear that I should, that the president won't just say "work twice as hard" this time. He would probably transfer Elder McMurphy to the office for the rest of his mission where he could keep an eye on him. But I can't get myself to call him until I figure it all out.

It was Sunday and we went to church with the one ward in the area. I love Sundays because it means I can spend time among people like myself, fellow believers. The members look on me as a friend and ally instead of an enemy come to warp their minds with heretical dogma. It feels so good to sit among them—perhaps Sister Higham's little boy, Rory, sitting proudly beside me—and take the sacrament. I savor the meetings with the ward mission leader where we plan which members will give us rides this week and which will give us dinner and discuss how investigators attending meetings with the ward are doing. Elder McMurphy enjoys church too. He runs from one group of members to another flashing that smile, telling his jokes, and generally endearing himself to everyone. Yesterday one of the deacons did the "joint" handshake with me.

The worst part of Sunday comes after the meetings are over and the afternoon dinner appointment is through. Then we are on our own again, obligated to venture out into the alien world of nonbelievers where no one loves us or even cares to see us. The letdown is mental and physical. I sometimes get sick to my stomach. The letdown eases off by Monday or Tuesday, but on Sunday I have to deal with it. I

deal with it the same way most missionaries in our mission deal with it—I attend church with some other denomination and call it public relations. It's better than knocking on doors and generally much more entertaining. I've been to a Jewish Bar-Mitzvah, marched in a Palm Sunday parade in a Catholic church, been to all black revivals where the a cappella music was fabulous. I've been to large Lutheran meetings where the sermon put me to sleep. I've been to little one-room churches with folding chairs for pews and a band with electric guitar and drums on stage. The ministers of these little churches will get going, faces turning red, as they dance up and down the aisle extolling the virtues of "Jeeeeesusssss."

Yesterday, we went to a mid-size Methodist church. The building and grounds were clean and looked after. The chapel was painted white and was filled with polished wooden pews. A baby grand piano sat in the front left corner. On the wall behind the pulpit hung one of those things that tell Mormons what page the hymns are on, only this one listed how much in tithes was collected last Sunday and the Sunday before that. \$126.26 last Sunday. About \$30 less than the Sunday before that. We sat near the back in the center pews, not wanting to be too conspicuous. I always had a fear that I would be the next elder in the mission to be thrown out of a church.

The meeting hadn't started yet when we arrived, but most of the worshippers were already there. They sat scattered around the chapel, or as they called it, the sanctuary, far enough apart that it didn't look very full. There was quite a mixture of age and gender, and I saw several families. It reminded me of a Mormon ward. I had to remind myself that these people were not like us. A wave of their alienness swept through me when I thought about it. These people and I were worlds apart. I had had people like these cry for me during discussions when I told them I didn't know I was "saved." I

was trying to explain the plan of exaltation to them, but they were too busy crying and praying for me to listen. It made me a little sick. Them crying and praying for me was like the people outside the ark crying and praying for Noah to be enlightened and to come out.

The hymn was sung and the pastor went immediately into the opening prayer in the usual protestant fashion. It seemed to me that they had a way of talking down to God. "Dear Lord we want to thank you for . . . And we ask you dear God to open the hearts of the sinners . . ." It wasn't the words they used but the way they yelled them to God as if he were hard of hearing. They sounded as if they took it for granted that he was listening. After the invocation, the minister told us all to stand up, which we did. Then he winked, waved his hand and everyone in the congregation turned to the person on either side and hugged, kissed, or shook hands, whatever seemed appropriate. Although we were alone on our pew and no one was very near, two men came back from the front and shook our hands and welcomed us there. I think this was their calling. They smiled and acted friendly. I shook hands and smiled back, but I didn't trust them. If they knew we were Mormon missionaries, and I was sure they did, the only way they would really wish our well-being was if we gave up the full truth for the small part they had. Elder McMurphy flashed his smile at them and seemed genuinely pleased at the attention.

The minister then went into that Sunday's sermon, one on loving your neighbor. It was a decent sermon given sincerely and interspersed with scripture and personal experience. I had to admit I even felt a good spirit in the chapel. I know that the Holy Ghost will bear witness to any truth. Elder McMurphy was listening intently. He seemed as

comfortable here as he did in sacrament meeting this morning. That made me uncomfortable.

After the sermon it was time, as the pastor put it, to come to God. He called a girl named Shelly to the piano and she played and sang a very beautiful, moving song about Christ on the cross. Her voice was sweet and melodic and she sang with her heart. I could have listened to her for hours. I guiltily wished President Smith would let us listen to music like hers. But if it wasn't the "Mo-Tab" it wasn't allowed. After she sang the song through once, she started it again but this time quieter. The pastor stood and prayed to the music. He prayed that God would touch the hearts of those in the audience who needed to come and accept Jesus as their personal savior so that they would come and do it now, for to put it off a day is to live another day in darkness. He prayed that those who needed to rid themselves of some sin would come down, and that those who had already accepted Christ, but needed to recommit would come down. People did go down: a middle-aged woman, an older man, a teen-aged girl, then another teen-aged girl. They walked past the pastor, who paced back and forth in front of the first pew with his arms stretched out either to God or to the audience as if he were standing in God's place, and knelt at a railing with heads bowed. Some knelt silently, motionless. Others visibly sobbed. Another young woman ran up crying as if she couldn't get there fast enough.

I was absorbed by the scene. It was the music that did it, the beautiful voice, the enchanting melody. Even after people quit going up, it went on, the music, the pastor with his arms out, sometimes audibly calling to those in the audience, sometimes only moving his lips. I wondered if he always went on this long or if this Sunday were something special. Then it occurred to me that maybe he was waiting for me and my companion. Maybe he was giving us a full chance to be

reclaimed. He hadn't alluded to us in his sermon, hadn't given us any particular looks, but who else would he be waiting for? Well, if it was a waiting game he was playing, he would have to sit down from exhaustion long before I stood up.

But then things started coming apart. Elder McMurphy leaned toward me and said, "Why don't we go up?" For a moment I was struck dumb. I looked at him, trying to find that look in his eye that means he's joking, but all I saw was simple sincerity.

"Don't . . . don't be stupid," I said, breathlessly.

He sat back up straight looking at the singing girl, looking at the pastor. The look of disappointment in his eyes was the only sign suggesting he had heard me. I prayed that it would stop soon and then I considered leaving right away. Before I could do anything, my companion stood determinedly and slid out the long way to the aisle. I'm sure my mouth dropped and my heart stopped. He was doing it. He was going to accept Christ as his personal savior . . . the Methodist way. I slid after him without standing up with it in mind to tackle him before he got to the front. I stopped before I got to the end of the pew. What a scene that would make. And maybe he wasn't going to kneel at the rail, maybe he was going to bear his testimony or do something else bold. But he wasn't. I had seen the look on his face. He was under their spell . . . a Mormon missionary defecting. I was near tears at the shock of it. How they would gloat, how they would mock. I wouldn't be able to stand it. It would be in the papers tomorrow: Mormon Missionary Joins Fold!

It was happening—heads turned as Elder McMurphy got toward the front. The pastor turned with his arms toward him as he came. Elder McMurphy knelt at the rail and bowed his

head. Shelly, at the piano, began playing and singing louder. Tears made her cheeks shine.

I envisioned going up and bodily dragging him out, but I thought the worshippers would stop me. I envisioned calling the zone leaders in for reenforcement. That way one could drag while the others fought the crowd off. But I only sat there, helpless, it seemed to me in hell, while Elder McMurphy was getting saved. He knelt there for some time with the others when finally the pastor yelled out, "Glory, hallelujah! Thank you, Jeeesusss, for the souls you've saved tonight." The congregation arose and sang "Amazing Grace" with tremendous passion while those at the rail stood and hugged each other, often with the pastor joining in as the third party. Elder McMurphy hugged and cried with all of them. He looked so happy.

I got up and stood in the aisle, completely confused by the scene. In the midst of the hugs, Elder McMurphy looked right at me and smiled. It was a big, heart-melting smile, and it was that smile that brought me out of my momentary paralysis. Was this all just a joke to him? How much damage had he done the Church just now? Oh, the shame he should feel and would feel before it was all over. I was full of righteous indignation and stared daggers at him. I know he saw them, but they had no effect. The smile, the happiness, stayed on his face. He hugged his way through the crowd and began his way up the aisle toward me. Three times he was stopped by members of the congregation who were singing ". . . and now I'm saved . . ." who hugged him and kissed him on the cheek, but he never took his eye from mine. The righteous indignation in me boiled higher.

"Elder McMurphy," I began, pouring acid into my words. I got no further before Elder McMurphy threw his arms around

T O R Y C . A N D E R S O N

me and pulled me close. He did this with such strength I could hardly breathe. He loosened his hold without removing his arms from around me and looked me in the eye.

"I love you, Elder Wilde," he said. "God loves you, too." As he said this, the Spirit bore witness that it was true. The witness was so powerful that it took my thunder away and I couldn't speak. He betrays the Church and then he tells me he loves me and the Spirit tells me he means it. Confused and in a panic I pushed him away and left the chapel. I almost hoped he wouldn't follow. He did follow. We went back to the apartment, but kept to ourselves. That smile and a certain glow never left him. There's been a certain hate inside of me since. I hate the feeling of hate. Elder McMurphy has finally gotten to me.

This morning when I awoke, Elder McMurphy was already up and dressed. He was kneeling at his bed saying his prayers. He has never gotten up earlier than me before. He has been acting strange all day, still smiling, acting like he loves me. What bothers me most is that I get the distinct impression he has forgiven me something. And what, I ask myself, have I got to be forgiven of? I should call President Smith, but I don't. "I love you," Elder McMurphy had said. "God loves you too." I know that God loves me. I didn't want to believe Elder McMurphy loves me. But the Spirit said it was true. I've got to call President Smith. But I've got to figure it out first.

# **Somebody's Mother**

**Teresa Holladay**

Sitting with my arm around her, I wondered if people knew. I mean, we looked so ordinary, a mother and her daughter, enjoying the concert together. Mom had freshened her lipstick and put a green bow in her hair. She could have been anybody's mother. Still, I wondered if you could tell.

Val was out in the foyer visiting with friends. She was flying home tomorrow, but I got to keep Mom for a few more weeks. I had a long list of things I wanted to do with her: meet my friends, shop, eat at my favorite restaurant. We had fun getting our hair done yesterday, and on Monday I thought

---

Born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah, Teresa is currently an engineering project manager with the J.C. Penney Company in Dallas, Texas. *Somebody's Mother* is an excerpt from a larger work-in-progress of the same name. Comments are welcome via e-mail ([itstessie@aol.com](mailto:itstessie@aol.com) or the Somebody's Mother Home Page: <http://members.gnn.com/itstessie/mother/index.htm>.)

we'd go to the mall. There was just so much time to make up for.

Tonight, I mostly just wanted to sit quietly and hold her hand. A musician friend of mine was performing at the church. It was a small affair, with only forty people or so scattered about the hall. Mom and I sat in the back, where her wheelchair would be out of the aisle. She could walk just fine fifty steps at a time, but we borrowed the chair so we could do more together. It had been in storage awhile; the gritty smell of oil from the spokes mixed with the sweaty stench of old leather. Mom looked so lovely in her new dress, it was hard to put her in such a nasty chair. Maybe the smells reminded me of where she used to be. I shuddered as I tugged her heavy chair into place beside me. Gosh, we were lucky to get her back.

I used to call my mother a bag lady. That was ten years ago, while I was at BYU. My bishop said that "bag lady" sounded so harsh; couldn't I speak of her more kindly? I told him that he didn't understand — my mother really was a bag lady. She slept in a field. She carried her clothes in plastic bags looped over her arm. She bathed in the sink at MacDonald's. What did he think I should call her?

"How about 'mother'?" he said. "Couldn't you just call her 'Mother'?"

No, I told him. I can't call her "Mother." She doesn't want to be my mother. I'd been a good daughter. I did everything good daughters do. I stayed out of trouble. I did my chores. I practiced the piano. I even helped with her projects. I braided rugs with her and antiqued old furniture. I got her books back to the library in time. I also called the police every time she ran away. I took care of the boys. I wired her bus fare. I looked for her in the rain. She still chose the street over us. No, I told

him. She doesn't want to be a mother. She wants to be a bag lady. I was just calling her what she was.

It took me awhile to get over being angry with him. It wasn't his fault he couldn't relate to my mother. His mother probably wore a white apron and took casseroles to the neighbors and kept her house all neat and tidy. My mother dressed in a clown suit and played her harmonica outside the mall. How could I expect him to understand?

"My mother lives on the street." It was the hardest thing in the world to explain. Nobody ever got it, not right away. They all thought they knew about the people who lived on the street, the bag ladies and the bums. Those people are lazy. Sick. Mental cases and drug addicts. Nobody loves them. Nobody misses them. Surely nobody's mother would ever wind up on the street.

Her old friends would ask about her. What's your mother up to these days? Is she still in social work? Where's she living now? I never knew what to say. She's doing her own thing, I'd usually reply. She has a place downtown. Well, tell her we said hello. We sure think a lot of your mother.

Of course, some people knew. Mom was hard to hide when she showed up needing a warm place to stay. One new roommate told me to move out after she met Mom — I hadn't even finished unloading the car. Another roommate told me Mom could stay on the couch, but she didn't want to hear her crazy talk. Could I somehow keep her from saying weird things? But most of my friends were okay with Mom. Linda Sue always packed her a lunch, and Stephanie brought her fresh towels when she dropped in. Joyce looked for her downtown, to drop dollar bills into her bucket, and Tammy painted Mom's nails.

People I didn't know well offered all kinds of advice: Go get her back. Have her committed. Or, she's all grown up. She can take care of herself. Let her go. Bring her back. Make her stay. Let her go. Nobody knew the answers.

Val was the only one who understood. Mom was as likely to arrive on her doorstep in the middle of the night as on mine. It gets cold in Utah. When it snowed, Mom usually came home. We'd get her cleaned up, try to find her a job, involve her in our lives. The longer we kept her, the more hope we had that she would become our mother again. We prayed for early winters and late springs, but something always snatched her away when it thawed.

At first, we looked for her. I would call the police and file missing persons reports. Val would check with relatives and friends. Together we scoured the hospitals, the shelters, the cheap hotels, the bus station, the place where she sold blood. It was like trying to find a penny in a pile of leaves. We almost never found her before she got in touch with us. Still, we tried.

I always felt luckier than Val — I remembered the mother who used to run out the door wearing tailored gray suits and Chanel No. 5. I grew up listening to her play *Clair de Lune* on our ebony grand piano and watching her paint snowy blue landscapes on our basement walls. Val remembered the scattered Mom, the one who raced through second-hand shops and covered our snowy basement with broken dolls. She grew up with the yelling, the tantrums, the paramedics. Dad left when I was 16, before it got really bad, and Stuart joined the Marines a year later. Val and the boys and I were the only ones who saw it happen. David and Clark were awfully young. I hope they only remember waking up to find her gone.

Val and I took turns raising the boys and sending Mom money to come home. For one three-year stretch, she actually

worked as a cook at the Lion House. But somewhere along the way, she started sleeping in a field and playing a harmonica outside the mall. She brought home people she'd met on the street. Some were dangerous. It was hard to deal with her. It was easier just to let her go.

At least, I thought it would be easier. I was thirty years old and in my sophomore year at BYU before I realized that I missed her. We had a costume party in my student ward. Angry with that bishop for thinking he knew how I should speak of my mother, I talked Val into coming to the party dressed as Mom. I guess I could have played the part, but Val was amenable.

We piled on old clothes from my closet — jeans and tee-shirts and a pair of smelly winter boots — and topped it off with a torn Hawaiian moo-moo. Val tied a bandanna around her head while I dragged in a shopping cart someone had left near the dumpster. We stuffed plastic bags with clothes and blankets from my room, threw some kitchen items into a grocery sack, and walked over to the party.

That cart rattled as we pushed it into the room; one wheel was bent and kept pulling the cart sideways. It took both of us to keep it on track. The bishop, dressed in overalls like Elmer Fudd, noticed the commotion much sooner than I wanted him to. My heart pounded a little when he turned and walked towards us.

"You must be Teresa's sister," he said, taking Val's hand in a firm clasp. "For a moment there, I thought I was going to meet your mother."

Val and I each held our breath for a minute, expecting him to chide us, but he didn't. He just chatted amiably and poked around in the cart. He paused when he got to the grocery sack, and nodded his head slowly, as though he saw

something we did not. I tried to see what he was looking at—Top Ramen, tuna, crackers, a can of soda, oranges, soap, toilet paper. I didn't see anything in there that would catch his attention, and yet there he stood, silent for just a moment. Then he clapped me on the shoulder, reminded Val and me to have fun, and went to greet another group of students. That was it. No lecture. No disapproval. Just, "have fun".

That night I didn't sleep. I kept wondering what it was he saw in the cart that I didn't see. Just some groceries we threw in, the kind of stuff we usually gave Mom when we saw her. I thought of her, the way she was the last time I had seen her. She was sitting on the sidewalk in her favorite spot outside MacDonald's on the Temple Square side of the mall. Leaning her forehead against a brick building, she was counting the coins in her bucket. Her red-and-purple clownsuit bulged over everything she owned, blouses and polyester pants and mismatched socks. Her skin, pale and waxy, reminded me of the paraffin I had used once to make candles. It was almost translucent, and very, very white. Her red lips were stretched and swollen, the result of too many hours on the harmonica. Lipstick circles on her cheeks were bleeding into the deep lines of her face.

That was the mother I had now, the woman who didn't seem like a mother at all. In the darkness of my room, I remembered the mother she used to be. I felt her weight on the edge of my bed as she leaned in to tell me stories. Her soft hands smoothed the hair back from my forehead over and over again, as if she were petting a kitten. As her fingers gently tugged through my hair, twisting it into a long braid across the pillow, she whispered a story to me: Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair.

I had forgotten. She told such wonderful stories. Cinderella, The Selfish Giant, The Little Red Hen. She knew all about Tom Sawyer and how he got kids to help him whitewash the fence. She told me about how little Heidi's grandfather hiked a long ways in a storm to find her when she was taken from the mountain. I knew all about Mom's childhood, the Christmas fire, the operation on her neck. I knew that she married Dad because he always stopped to help people broken down by the side of the road. And I remembered that, somewhere, maybe a long time ago, my mother loved me.

I realized what the bishop had seen in Val's cart. The blanket in the plastic bag was carefully folded. The Top Ramen, the tuna, the soda . . . it was enough to hold her through a few days on the road. I had been so busy surviving the chaos that I had forgotten something: The woman who played the harmonica on the street was somebody's mother. Mine.

It's only been six years since we got her back. Six years, overlapped with the last of her years on the street. Her health is fading; there is still so much I want to do with her before she's gone.

The lights in the chapel dimmed as the concert began. I pulled Mom's chair a little closer, close enough to bump my knees against the spokes as I reached over to take her hand. The strength is all but gone, the result, her doctor says, of a little stroke and years of untreated diabetes. But her fingers are still long, like mine. We have the same wrinkles, the same blue bulgy veins. I play Clair de Lune the same way, with the same light touch.

Brushing a wisp of hair away from her ear, I looked at her sweet face. Just a few minutes into the concert and her eyelids

TERESA HOLLADAY

were already drooping shut. Her color was better than it had been in a long time, but I felt bad, anyway. I had run her ragged in the few days she and Val had been here.

We went to the beauty parlor yesterday. Sally has done my hair for the last year. She lost her own mother to cancer just before I met her. I knew she would be good to my mom.

Mom wore her special dress so Sally would know how to style her hair. It was a gauze dress with lots of ecru lace — Mom said it looked like a wedding gown for a flower child. I bought her some elegant green earrings and a pretty bow for her hair, and Val did her makeup. The concert wasn't until the next day, but Mom likes to get dressed up.

She asked Sally to pull her hair into a French braid. Her hair was well past shoulder-length, like mine. She liked Val to keep it colored jet black. "I don't want to look old," she said. "I'm too young to look old."

As Sally twisted Mom's hair and coo'ed over how soft it was, I looked at Mom. She was beaming. Every now and then, she'd squint at herself in the mirror and reach a hand up to feel how the braid was progressing. Sally took her time, smoothing Mom's hair on the sides, turning her head every which way to see how it looked, and gathering it into a knot at the base of her neck.

When Sally was finished, she handed Mom a mirror and pulled her chair around so she could see her reflection. Mom look so clean and so beautiful. "You don't know how lucky you are to have your mother with you," Sally said to me, patting Mom's braid one last time.

I nodded, and wondered if she knew.

# **Jonah, Sailing to Tarshish**

**An excerpt from *The MTC: Set Apart***

**A novel by**

**Benson Y. Parkinson**

Elder Phil Jeppsen, skin prickling, sat rigidly at a classroom desk his first afternoon in the MTC, looking neither right nor left, legs crossed at the knees. He had grown heavy and solemn in his nervousness, barely breathing except when the tightness in his muscles and chest nudged him to fill his lungs. Frère Mueller, who had introduced himself as their evening instructor, looked over the circle of his seven timid pupils, clearing his throat once, then again. Blond, pale-eyed and trim, he nevertheless seemed stolid and imposing, and though he smiled blandly and was solicitous in his gestures, the others recoiled. "While I'm writing zis down,"

---

Benson Y. Parkinson, a BYU graduate, is the author of a biography, *S. Dilworth Young (Covenant, 1994)*, and a novel, *The MTC: Set Apart* (Aspen 1995), from which this excerpt is drawn. He and his wife, Robin, have five children. He writes full time, diapers babies, and runs AML-List, an Internet mailing list devoted to Mormon literature, all from the basement office of his South Ogden home.

he said, turning to the board, "I want you to r-r-read through the vocabulary on page four of your manual." Jeppsen puzzled over his accent, unnaturally slow and with all the words sliding into each other—that would be French—but with a certain whine and with hard, American r's. "I know zat eight weeks seems like a long time," Mueller went on, "but I think it will be gone befor-r-re you know." He chuckled to himself as he wrote out his words. "We'll make it go fast for you. Put you to work."

Jeppsen, who in thumbing through the manual earlier had seen little he didn't recognize, nevertheless opened his book and ticked off the list of twenty-one cognates. Mueller, back turned, warned, "I'm going to quiz you, you know." When he finished with the board a few minutes later, he turned to face the class. "Comment dit-on chapel?" he said, surveying name tags. "Class, when I say, 'comment dit-on,' that means, 'How do you say.' Frère . . . Jeppsen! *En français*, in French, *comment dit-on chapel?*"

Jeppsen, preoccupied with a word list several chapters ahead, didn't answer right off. "Oh, I'm sorry. *En français on dit chapelle*," he said in a quick, soft voice.

"Très bien," cried Mueller, moving right on. "Frère, uh, *Rignell*, *comment dit-on professor?*" Rignell answered in a hesitant whisper, "Uh, uh, *pro—, pro—?*" Mueller barked, "Enthusiasm, class! *'faut un peu d'enthousiasme, hein!'*" He stumbled with them through a few more words, then spent several minutes on the necessity of lifting up one's voice, here first, then in France. "You did the exercise?" he asked afterward. This drew many sheepish stares. "Oh, did I forget to mention it? Well, go ahead. Right below the vocabulary." He watched them a moment. "Don't worry about writing in your book," he said, then turned again to the board. Jeppsen

glanced around the classroom. Rignell and Wilberg, his companions since that morning, were tense and flushed. Anthon, the tall, athletic elder, stared darkly at his lap.

Jeppsen looked over the drill, then the next several. Just as with the vocabulary—nothing he hadn't mastered years before. Though he did not wish to presume nor call attention to himself, eight weeks of this seemed like an awfully long time. "Ah, Elder? Elder Mueller," he said meekly, "what if we already know French?"

Mueller froze with the chalk raised, the incongruity of Jeppsen's response during the drill only now registering. "*Que je suis bête!*" he said, slapping his forehead with the chalk hand. "*What? You studied at university?*"

"Yes," Jeppsen answered in French, "and I've spent several months traveling in France."

"Not bad, not bad!" he said, then mused, "I wonder why they didn't put you with . . . Hold on just an instant!" He slipped out the door. Anthon and one of the district's two sisters, the blonde, looked at each other and giggled. Anthon's companion, the woolly elder, teased, "Oh-oh. You're in trouble now!" The other sister, who was short and pudgy, said, "Gol, that was good. And you've been to France? Some people have all the luck."

Wilberg said, "He's been all over the world, man! The guy's a little genius. He knows three different languages."

"Two languages, really," Jeppsen protested, "and I've really only been to—"

"Yeah, I've heard about that," interrupted the woolly elder. "You're from Australia, right? Aren't they supposed to have really good schools down there? No wonder you're so smart. I was readin' how of all the big countries, you know,

like the real modern ones, how our schools were supposed to be like last." Jeppsen bloated, but caught himself. There he went, swelling like a puffer, which seemed all the more audacious in view of how narrow and stifling he had found his time in Australian schools. He began to mistrust this elder, as much for his abuse of the Queen's English as for his flattery. Mueller returned, signaling him to come and to bring his books. Jeppsen gathered his things into a stack and stood. "Well, nice knowing ya, Elder," said the woolly flatterer, the others concurring and wishing him luck, he and Wilberg slugging his shoulder as he passed. Phil Jeppsen said "Likewise, I'm sure," nodding and fumbling his burden.

Mueller waited with him in the hall, chatting in French. "*Where were you, then?*" Phil answered matter-of-factly, Dijon, St. Etienne, Valence . . . "Ah really? I've been there myself—I was raised in Lyon. What did you think of the hostel in Toulon. Oh, alors, là. I thought I would die. Your French isn't half bad, unlike some of these Canadians that come here pretending to know so much." Phil cocked an eyebrow. He held his stack of books balanced against his belly while Mueller talked, for fear that the moment he set it down, whomever it was they waited for would arrive. "I don't see why they didn't just send you to France, really. Not so very long ago they would have. In my branch we used to get missionaries from England without a word of training. Handed you a book and said go to. Of course, it hasn't been so long that all new missionaries went directly to their countries." Ian Perkins, Phil's branch president in Biloela, had told him as much, and Phil himself had seen no point in coming here, yet he accepted his call stoically, and found this talk on Mueller's part exasperating. "Well, there's no reason you couldn't start right in. You've got your discussion book, after all." Mueller indicated an empty classroom across the hall. Phil straightened up, nearly dropping his stack. "Go on, then," Mueller said. "It's the

*small binder, right there on top. You'll begin with the G, the baptismal discussion.*" He started off.

"Oh, frère," Jeppsen called after him. "One question. Do I need to learn this word for word?" Phil thought of the elders who had taught him the discussions, with their white, short-sleeved shirts and sunburned skins and feathered hair. He knew them so brief a time he hardly remembered their names. He had found them on a street corner after making a trip to Rockhampton to look them up. He received their lessons over the course of a single weekend in their apartment, was baptized that Sunday evening after attending church, and left early Monday. What an oddity he must have seemed to them, John the Baptist in off the desert, bearded and hairy, clothes frayed, with few questions or comments or much of anything at all to say, disappearing as quickly as he came. How could they have known that of all their contacts he would remain faithful.

Mueller turned. "Word for word? Absolutely!" Phil had been conscious that the missionaries who taught him recited memorized text, and though he accepted all they said, he had sometimes been irritated at the examples they used, or the way they asked questions without seeming to know what they wanted for an answer. He had thought to develop a less rigid, more natural presentation and was of the opinion that this word-for-word would only get in the way. But he resolved to obey, absolutely.

He entered the empty classroom. There was no sound but the hum of missionaries studying aloud in classrooms down the hall. The brown brick walls seemed heavy, and the thin, dry air, which the evening light had colored yellow, difficult to breathe. He sat down at a desk and put his books on the floor, except for the small binder, which he set in front of him.

As he looked at the sealed, colored pages, an inch thick, it occurred to him that this was his task, this book, that he was to memorize the whole of it. He had hardly learned anything longer than a few lines before. Once he had memorized a brief speech for an English class. He remembered rising, looking blindly out over his classmates, and sitting down again when he was through, though he had no memory of having spoken. His stomach churned slightly. Gathering his will, he took the cap from his pen and ripped the plastic from the pages. He found the baptismal discussion and counted—six pages was all. He read the short paragraph on page two carefully, attaching weight to each of the words to see if he would retain any of them. Halfway through he realized he was reading a suggested response to the question on the right. He flipped ahead, discovering the left-hand pages were reserved for comments. All right, three pages. He smiled and exhaled, then read the first sentence: *While translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, were struck by its teachings concerning baptism.* This was familiar territory. He repeated it easily and went down for another line, then one more.

"*Bonjour, numéro deux!*" came a shout as heavy footsteps burst upon him and the door bounded off its stop. Jeppsen, who had laid his palms on his book while he tested himself, started so hard he tore the page nearly clean from the bottom three of its six rings. "*Allez, hop! We've got a lot of work to do, pleased to make your acquaintance!*" A gawking, bespectacled elder, a Frenchman, doubled over to one side to look at him upside-down. "*What's this? They said you were an Australian!*" His thick, wire-rim glasses lifted from his nose, and his reddening scalp showed through the fine, brown bristles of his head, which were cropped flat on top. Jeppsen watched him cockeyed as the elder snapped himself upright. Mueller

appeared in the doorway with Elder Southerland, one of the French Zone supervisors.

"*Frère Jeppsen,*" said Mueller, "*I present to you your new companion, frère Sainéan . . . but I see you've already met.*" Jeppsen rose cautiously.

Sainéan shook his right hand, then reached down for his left and shook that, then shook the right once more for good measure. "*I'm much obliged, at your service, your humble fellow servant . . .*" He dropped to one knee and bowed his head. Jeppsen hiccupped in his surprise. "*Allez, vite!*" said Sainéan. "*You've got to get packing.*"

"No," said Elder Southerland, in English, steady and busy-looking. "You've misunderstood. It's you who'll be moving."

"*Moi?*" Sainéan gripped the two lobes of his head and fell on his seat. "*Encore? I just unpacked!*"

"You'll be in Limoges District, and I want you sleeping in the same building as your companion," said Southerland, checking his watch and jotting something down on a clipboard. "Might as well get used to the idea." He raised his eyebrows without lifting his eyes.

"Anyway," said Mueller, "*it's not just you. Frère Jeppsen will be moving one room down, and frères Wilberg and Rignell will be going in with the others.*" Just as quickly Sainéan was on his feet and tugging at Jeppsen's sleeve.

"Well, let's get going!"

"Let me get my books, will you!" said Jeppsen, smiling, then frowning. Sainéan, without seeming to hear, was out the door already and down the hall. Southerland, laughing, told Jeppsen he had better go.

Mueller sighed. "Allez. I'll send your books with the others." Jeppsen, shrugging a little desperately, reached hurriedly for his black, French-language triple combination, then followed.

Sainéan, in the walkways, skipped, balanced on the rails, squatted, hopped like a frog, and went any way but forward. Jeppsen made another resolution, to take him in stride, but walked himself in a dignified manner. Sainéan jabbered in rapid, clicking French all the way to their dormitory and up the stairs and all the time he spent packing. Jeppsen, fatigued and unable to get a word in edgewise, squatted with his back against the wall. Sainéan told him he had been called to Tahiti and had been here four weeks already, his first companion having finished his discussions and gone. He said he had spent the last two days in a threesome with a pair of elders going to Belgium, neither of whom could understand a word of his French and very little of his English. This occasioned a run-down of Sainéan's Belgian jokes. Jeppsen listened poorly, bristling at the thought of moving again, even to the next room. Sainéan, telling how many of his Belgian cousins you could lure into one of those little *deux-chevaux* cars with a sack of fries, laid out all his suits and shirts neatly, rolled them up in a log and tried to make them fit in his suitcase by sitting on it. Jeppsen had had his fill of travel long ago. It wearied him to even think of the setting down, packing up, and moving on he had done.

Phil's voyages had recommenced after a year's hiatus with his return to Sydney less than a week before. He had arranged to leave for his mission from there rather than Brisbane in order to attend the temple and spend the last two days with his family. This on the heels of three years of travel, during which time he had not been to Sydney nor seen his parents. It had hardly seemed home. Conversation at dinner was polite and reserved. Not even the food tasted the same. His parents,

practicing Anglicans, had always professed tolerance for other religions, but though they went out of their way not to make an issue of his conversion, he couldn't help but feel they were disturbed. His father was full of questions about "swagging it" during Phil's student days in France and in the interior, and he hardly mentioned religion until after the main course. Then, sipping at a wine glass, stretching out in his great wooden chair, he remarked, "Latter-day Saints! One of the modern world's few revealed religions. Commonly known as the Mormons." Phil was suspicious, remembering him greeting a new graduate student, a former Moonie, at a reception in similar terms. His mother, rising to bring sweets from the kitchen, said Phil would have to tell them all about it, her flush belying the polite enthusiasm in her voice.

Phil, trying to mask his nervousness with an air of nonchalance, said, "I seem to recall an American colleague of yours presenting you with a Book of Mormon several years back."

"Yes, I started that," said his father. "Isn't it awfully dry?"

"Dry? I'm not sure you're . . . I . . ." It had never occurred to Phil that one could read the book without its grabbing on and holding until the Spirit came to carry the words to one's core. He told him he found it anything but dry and that he must give it another try.

"I suppose I must," his father sighed, then humped, "Well, anyway, I've been meaning to ask you about this rite you're to participate in tomorrow. I believe I once read that the Mormons obtained their ceremony from the Masons and that it was secretive and mysterious and involved an oath of silence."

"You'd begrudge me my oaths!" joked Phil, vexed because he knew his father as a young man had considered a career in the priesthood.

"But you mistake my meaning. I support you. I do," said his father, raising his wine glass, a bibulous twinkle in his eye.

His mother, returning with cake and pudding on a silver tray, jumped into the conversation. "France! I so loved the countryside when we were there. Will you be living singly or in groups?" She set dishes by his and his father's places, taking none herself. Phil explained that they were sent out two-by-two, like the apostles, and that while they provided their own clothing, rent, and living expenses, they were rotated between apartments maintained by the mission. She lit a cigarette as he spoke, attempting to maintain eye contact while discretely turning her head to exhale her smoke. Phil stumbled—he could not habituate himself to her smoking at the table. She had smoked perhaps once a week when he was in high school. His father smoked a pipe, infrequently. Dr. Jeppsen, digging into his dessert, asked about Phil's Australian travels again—geologic formations, wildlife, the aboriginal populations of the towns where he stayed. Mrs. Jeppsen pursued more practical concerns, wanting to know about his rooms, asking how he kept himself clean while camping, worrying over a rash he had developed on his legs, then laughing at herself. "I'm making quite a fuss, aren't I."

Phil, burdened by their continuing questions and with a growing pain in his side, said he wasn't feeling well and excused himself. His mother, concerned, wanted to know if there was anything she could do. "No, please, I'll be fine," he said, retreating to his former room.

The next morning Phil's mother drove him to the temple in Carlingford on the way to her acupressure appointment.

She had offered to spend the day with him, acting as his advisor at Keith O'Brien's, where he planned to buy his suits. He had hesitated in his response, fearing she would nag him, but the thought of entering a department store alone made him ill at ease. Upon arriving in Sydney he had gone in search of baptismal clothing, expecting to visit one store and be one hour, but it soon turned into seven stores, and all that morning and half the afternoon. He carried the clothes in a plastic shopping bag on his lap in the Volvo. Ian Perkins had advised him they would double as temple clothing and save him rental fees. He watched his mother put her hand to her ear as she drove, tugging at the metal staple pinching its cartilage. His mother, who didn't miss much, said, "You pro'bly think I'm superstitious, but I'd swear it's helping. I'm down to a pack a day."

Phil, looking away, noted with some disdain her use of the word "superstitious." His mother, trying so hard to hide her disapproval, must surely have had *superstitious* on the mind. It didn't matter—he thought her superstitious right back, in a harmless sort of way. Cultured, yet impulsive and insecure, she had always had a penchant for fads. Phil remembered her attending the lectures accompanying the Ring series at the Opera House with a book on pyramid power under her arm.

As she drove, she commented on the weather, which had reached the high thirties the day before, though today its light and warmth were diluted by high clouds and a cool, wet breeze. Phil, hardly hearing, responded with an absent nod. She gave tips on proper nutrition, on how to fold clothes so they wouldn't wrinkle, and on the care and cleaning of oxford shoes. "You'll lengthen their lives by six months if you have metal taps put on the heels." Phil squirmed and said little. His mother, nervous in the quiet car, searched for something in her purse. The two wedges of her buckwheat hair swung

together beneath her chin as she wrestled with its contents with one hand. "My reading circle has been doing D. H. Lawrence this month," she offered. "I believe he's one of your old favorites." Phil perked up, intending to tell her he had been meaning to have a look at *Quetzalcoatl*, but she lifted a cigarette to her lips. He opened his window. She flicked her disposable lighter clumsily, then cracked her own window, saying "It's our bad habits getting to you again, isn't it." He answered nothing, turning his sour face to the chilly wind.

Her Phil. So bright and hard-working and grown up and intense and rough around the edges—where in France or America or wherever he landed was he going to find someone to look after him. She had never doubted but that his ability would take him as far as he wished to go, and while she had hoped he would leave his mark in paleontology or metaphysics or something equally ordinary, it was obvious he believed in this deeply, and she could not expect less of him than that he give himself to it. Arriving at the temple, self-conscious in her sleeveless blouse and slacks, she dropped him at the gate. "Give us a ring if you should need me, Luv," she said, smiling with all she had to offer, as he gathered his sack and scriptures.

"Sure, Mum," he said distantly, stretching across the upholstery to kiss her cheek.

He walked through the white gateposts, up to the white building and through its glass doors. He was met at the front desk by an elderly man and woman, both of them with white hair and clothes. He gave his recommend to the man, who retrieved a list from a drawer and ran his finger down it, failing to find Phil's name. "You did call ahead . . ."

"No one told me I was to call ahead."

The attendant scratched his scalp. "I'm afraid there are no live sessions planned before the one this evening, and it's been full for a week."

"I'll be entering the Missionary Training Center in two days!" Phil blustered. Why was life always dropping surprises on him? The attendant stepped around the counter to calm him, speaking in a soothing voice.

"There, there, I'm sure we can work something out. So, you've got your call, have you?" Phil, conscious of the smell of smoke on his own clothing, said yes, to France. "To France! My own grandson's in Germany! And called from Biloela?" The attendant, white down to the tufts of hair on his earlobes, asked if he had known an Ian Perkins there, at which Phil brightened. Ian, podgy wombat, sulky child—how did he manage to make his influence felt so far and wide. He laughed and struck his hands together, asking the attendant where he had known him, clamping his teeth shut when he realized his voice had grown too loud. The attendant ignored it if he noticed. "Let's just say our paths have crossed," he said vaguely, in a warm, paternal tone that bothered Phil. "Listen," the attendant said, "why don't you wait right here." He clasped Phil's arm with his big, fleshy hands, tugging downward as though to make certain he stayed put.

The man disappeared down a carpeted hallway, leaving Phil with the female attendant, who wore a heavy white robe and orchid. The temple was beginning to seem a fortress—entering in meant getting by the sentries first. The woman matched the man in age and demeanor, grandmother to his grandfather. She could have been nursing her roses, he hoeing his beans. "You're not nervous, are you?" she said. Phil assured her that he was certainly not nervous. She said, "Don't you worry now. He'll be right along." Phil craned to take in

what he could of the waiting room and halls. His hand lifted to his collar the moment he glimpsed himself in a mirrored panel on the opposite wall—he had forgotten to put on the tie he had hung on his bedroom doorknob before going to sleep. He gritted his teeth in embarrassment, but then considered the building, which struck him as especially clean and hushed, the workers all busy, the people in the waiting room serene. The agitation he had felt most of that morning had continued with him across the threshold. He waited for something to overwhelm him, a cloud or sense of peace. He had come to Sydney on the Capricorn Express, which from Gladstone to Sydney had taken a full day and night. His impending reunion with his parents had weighed on him, but he refused to dwell on it. He had a duty to them. If they turned him aside that was their choice. He dreamed on the train of entering the sanctuary of the temple, which he must have recognized from pictures, and being struck in that instant with the realization that he could let down his guard, because in this place he could not be tempted. This was the mystery, Satan had no power to enter these doors, the fertile soil of the mind might be given rest in this place, if no other, because none here sowed evil. With this realization had come a swelling almost like water, a feeling that was joyous and pleasurable to the point of being physical, too physical it seemed to him in retrospect, and even as he dreamed it he sensed a dissonant undercurrent. Perhaps it would come when he'd got past the sentries, or at some deeper station . . . but he thought not. Surely that would have been too simple.

The male attendant returned with another, chunky man, who wore a jacket, tie, handkerchief and leather shoes, all white. This man, with wetted-back black hair, was windy and apologetic. He told him in his high, rough, excitable voice that, while he would have opportunities to be endowed in the

States, Australian elders deserved to be endowed in Australian temples, and that if there were any way he could possibly see fit to return that evening, though the session would be crowded, they could always set up another folding chair. Phil cringed, thinking the day lost. His mother would be at least two hours. There was a pay phone in the external foyer, anyway. He gave them his name for the list, thanked them quietly, and left to make his call.

His mother broke her appointment, in spite of his protests, to drive him across the bridge and through the slow jumble of inner-city traffic to Keith O'Brien's. Phil, in bad humor, couldn't be satisfied with anything the bleached, curly-headed salesman brought. "Ah, this looks nice," said his mother from the racks, holding up the sleeve of a tweed jacket. Phil said he found such informality unbecoming of a minister of the gospel. The salesman squinted at him, but then slipped behind a curtain, returning with a wool three-piece suit. "This ought to please you then." Phil, bothered, said he found the look too worldly. "You've certainly got fussy," his mother said. Phil was aware he was being difficult. Growing up, he had been indifferent to clothes, to the point of wearing his school uniform on weekends. But when a thing had to be right, that was all there was to it.

"You've seen the missionaries, Mum," Phil said, rubbing his scalp. He tried to remember the elders standing by their car in Rockhampton, but all he could see were their white shirts, blinding in the tropical sun. Mrs. Jeppsen, still leafing through the racks, pulled out a dark-blue blazer with slacks a few shades lighter. "They've got to be all one color," Phil groaned. Sighing, she returned to the racks. The salesman, whose hair was very long in back, appeared with a pale, baggy, gray suit that buttoned up almost to the neck, draped with a wine-red tie. Phil, whose irritation with the salesman was

growing to dislike, ignored him, flipping through suits in a rack along the wall. His mother placed a hand on his arm. He jumped, then looked at her out of the corner of his eye. "You're going to want me to try that on, aren't you."

"I don't believe you're being polite," she winked.

Impatient, he held out his arms. The salesman threaded them through the arm holes then cuffed him on the shoulders. "Very smart, if I might say so."

Phil snapped, "What I need is something drab and dull! Bring me the dullest suit you've got." The floor supervisor, a redhead man with a beard, stepped in to show them a row of shapeless blue and brown coats with matching vests and slacks, on sale for sixty dollars a set. Phil let his mother look them over. His mind on the temple now, he checked his watch. The bearded salesman pulled a blue suit in his size from the rack and held it in front of him like an infant after a blessing. Phil said it would do fine, did it come in brown? Just put one of each in a sack. His mother said that was nonsense—he'd have to try it on first. So he took it to the dressing room, where he pulled on the unhemmed slacks and jacket, then strained at his image in the mirror.

While his slacks were being hemmed he chose three ties from the dozen his mother had picked out and draped over her arm. He tried on a white shirt, tying a plain, striped tie. She made him do the tie over because he had got the tail too long, then fiddled with it herself, trying to get the crease to stay put in the center. He pulled on the jacket and made for the mirror. "You'd better have a look with the waistcoat," she warned, and he obeyed. He chose a raincoat, then took a clothes brush, comb, shoe cleaning kit, travel iron, and seven pairs of socks. When his pants returned, he made for his

## T H E M T C : S E T A P A R T

billfold, so thick it did not bend easily, but his mother grabbed his arm and pulled him to one side.

"Your father and I have talked this over, and we want to help." She took her checkbook from her purse.

"That's not necessary."

She hesitated, but said, "We think what you're doing is important and we want to be a part of it." He shrugged and smiled shyly, touched by the gesture and embarrassed to be so mothered. She pinched his cheek.

She left him at the store and went to open envelopes at the children's charity to which she had devoted one night a week for as long as Phil could remember. Phil wore the blue suit, taking the plastic bag with his white clothes under his arm, having sent the brown suit and all else home with his mother. He walked to Circular Quay, bought two meat pies from a Greek immigrant at a kiosk, and ate them on the docks. He read the papers people had left on the benches and argued with an Ananda Marga disciple passing out literature at the station. He caught the line to Carlingford, then took a taxi in the twilight to the temple.

Phil's mother telephoned his father with the message to wait for Phil to call for a ride home. Dr. Jeppsen spent the evening digging in their modest garden and feeding the rabbits, ducks, and guinea pigs, then retreated to the sitting room with a detective novel. Phil's father was a big-boned man who looked more like he ought to be breaking clumps of dirt or unloading a truck than teaching chemistry at a university. The son of a bricklayer and building contractor, when he wasn't reading he was wiggling his way on his belly into the rafters or putting his eye to the ground to sight a row. When Phil telephoned he roused himself, considering a drink, but deciding against it on his son's behalf. He backed the Holden

out of their tiny garage, climbing out to pull the garage door shut, lingering a time in the brisk air with the motor running. Approaching Carlingford, he recalled a petition by residents seeking to keep the temple out, on the grounds that its spire was too tall for laws restricting commercial signs. He had passed by it any number of times since it had gone up. Yet driving into view now he did not remember it as strikingly white and clean and luminous as this evening. He caught sight of Phil waiting by the entryway, dusted in its light, wearing one of his new white shirts, uncharacteristically buttoned to the collar, also white socks and white tie, only slightly askance, under his new blue suit. It seemed a second skin, the vestment of his calling. It would do to compliment him, though in spite of himself he found the whole business left an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

He nodded to Phil as he climbed into the car. Phil, his face red from the chilly air, nodded back. "It went well, then, I presume?" Yes, his son answered briefly. He idled at the gate, seeking words, shifting gears. "Are you hungry? Can I get you something to eat?" Phil, calm and distant, shook his head.

He gunned the car to swing into traffic, rolling Phil in his seat, then drove for a time in silence. "Well, you *are* going to tell me something, aren't you?" he said, straightening his arms and extending his stubby fingers. Phil could be so maladroit.

"I'm not sure what I'm permitted to tell."

"So, it *was* some great mystery, I'm tempted to say." Dr. Jeppsen thought with regret on their conversation at dinner. He had known he was being disagreeable, but his wine told him it was harmless, or that if it wasn't, he wouldn't remember anyway. He waited for Phil to answer, but it did not seem to occur to his son to speak.

Neon from shopping centers splashed like candlelight on their clothes and faces as they drove. Phil, pondering the ritual's unfolding, remembered Anglican Easter services, for which his family went in to St. Andrew's; rising from the bench with the congregation, bowing his head, reciting with them at the proper times. His father as a boy had sung in the choir at Trinity, though he could barely carry a tune. He had spoken of the long rehearsals, of how full of the wiggles he and the other boys had been, of the sharp rejoinders of their ill-tempered choirmaster, but also of the solemnity of the lessons and processions, the reverberations of their songs in the yellow, vaulted ceiling, and the candle glow on the loose, white sleeves of their surplices. His father had no great commitment to the English Rite and always taught Phil to be respectful of others' forms of worship. Yet Phil thought his father had been impressed as a boy and that it had affected the kind of man he became, that in his father's mind the Paraclete had entered into him with that glow, which he felt in his heart was holy and clean.

Phil felt tender towards his father and wanted to include him, so he told how Carlingford had become the locus of pilgrimages from all over Australia. "Ian Perkins told me he was married twice, once by the magistrate in Biloela and again three days later in New Zealand. That was the nearest temple at the time. He told me he waited until he was sealed before consummating his marriage. Then they spent their honeymoon near the temple, so they could go through again at the beginning of each day."

"Seems like a lot of trouble to have to go to."

"Well, they didn't *have* to. I got the impression they wanted to."

His father, coming to a stop at a traffic light, craned to look at his son. Phil could see only shadow, but imagined the half-moon eyebrows and the drawn-up mouth, his father's incredulous look. "Well, you weren't married today."

"No, I was endowed."

"What, funded?" his father probed. "Promised in marriage? Dowry comes from endow."

"Endowed with power from on high, I suppose," Phil said, then thought a moment. "Endowed with a spiritual inheritance."

"Then it's a passage into adulthood."

"I suppose. Strange you should say that, really. You know, there's so much of it that went right by me. I remember trying to get a fix on each new thing as it was presented, trying to hold onto all these pieces in the periphery, too, so I could think them out later and see how they related. I gave up finally. I suppose it takes years to understand properly. But one thing that impressed me early on, right after they'd got done with . . ." Phil paused again to consider what he should or should not say. ". . . with the preliminaries, they had me wait in a room with the other candidates. No one spoke above a whisper, and all was still and the room and everything about it was white—white plaster and wallpaper and oak furniture and everyone in white clothing and even the attendants' hair was white. And I thought to myself, *Ah, a chance to sit and think things through.* And all I could think of was how primitive a few aspects of the ceremony to that point had seemed. Not unsophisticated, just—primal, fundamental, I don't know quite how to put it. And that made me think of Aboriginal rites of passage and knightly vigils in the Middle Ages. You know that when I was a teenager I was fascinated by that sort of thing. I had no idea what they were going to do with me

next. I didn't think they'd be coming to make me go walkabout or cut my hand or put me in a hole and make me fast until I had a dream. But I wished they would. I was jealous. But then it struck me that this was nonsense. You may know the Mormon concept of the history of religion is not one of evolution but diffusion—if there are similarities in the world's religions, it's because they are apostate forms of an original, universal revelation. It occurred to me here where all was pure and calm and ordered that all those other ceremonies referred to this one, and not the other way around."

Phil's father seemed to concentrate on the bends and long dips and climbs in the dark sideroad he had chosen. After a time he said, "Everyone ought to have something they can believe in so firmly." Off the ridgetops where the city was built, the bush grew lush and dark as a rain cloud, except for the pale, buffed trunks of the angophoras, which were tall and smooth, like iron posts. "I suppose I'm jealous, too."

### Job in Winter

(Job 1:19 - And behold a great wind came . . .)

Cold winds before dawn  
in from empty skies,  
from across horns  
of the empty moon,  
from edges of burned out stars.  
And I lie listening.

My wife warm  
beside me,  
her gentle breath  
belies a strength  
no longer mine.

Kezia and the other girls  
up and about  
the kitchen now,  
laughter among sauce pans  
and geraniums,  
light over window sill,  
and linen cloth.

### J O B I N W I N T E R

The boys at chores  
among barn and shed,  
builders of my broken dream,  
tall sons to bear me  
in my age.

But in these bitter hours  
before the light  
the others weigh  
upon my mind —  
the broken ones that come  
as questions  
on the empty winds.

What studied hand  
gathered them that  
afternoon,  
ten in one spot  
and sent  
the great wind in?

Who tipped the wall  
and watched it go?  
Who mined the base?  
Whose hands slapped  
off the settled dust?

E. LEON CHIDESTER

Ten broken bodies  
around that table  
celebrating death—  
my first born  
and my youngest,  
blood in her golden hair.

Cattle?  
Will ten more replace  
the slaughtered?  
The cow forgot the butchered  
calf?

My heart moves in morning shadows  
beneath these ancient walls;  
when will the winds  
be back?

*E. Leon Chidester*

---

E. Leon Chidester lives with his family in Cedar City, Utah, where he teaches Spanish at Southern Utah University. A previous contributor to the Wasatch Review International, he has published in several other journals.

## Cub River

**Paul Rawlins**

The trailer house still stands on the lot outside. A brother of mine lives there now with his family, and down the road is our in-town field, a pan in the mouth of the canyon where the bottomland opens up in the shape of a spoon to the south of the Cub River, which this year has risen up as close as it has ever come to flooding the field.

God brought my people here, to these valleys, some hundred and fifty years ago. Lewises, Ponds, Talbots, Van Ordens, Bensons. And Whitehalls. Great-grandma Whitehall followed a wagon across the Great Plains as the second wife of Selah O. Whitehall when she was thirty-eight years old. At thirty-nine, she gave birth to her only child that lived, Joseph

---

Paul Rawlins is a senior editor for Aspen Book. He is a prolific writer who has won many national and international awards—the most recent of which is the 1996 Flannery O'Conner award. This story will be included in a collection of his stories to be published this fall.

Martin, a hundred miles to the south in Salt Lake City. They came to Cub River before Joseph Martin saw his second birthday, and there they stayed.

God brought my people here, and he has had his way with them. He has stormed on them and froze their fields and sent grasshoppers in clouds dark as thunderheads to devour their grain. At other times he has multiplied their blessings of the womb and of the earth and kept corruption stayed at the gilded gates of the cities, far from the slow-moving farm towns. In the best of years, the rains come early and the frosts come late; you'll cut hay three times and get most of your sugar beets in before Halloween. In these valleys, the saints of God have sung to him in their tabernacles and reverenced him in high and holy worship within the stone walls of the temple they raised up in Logan over one hundred years ago. Here, he has preserved and kept those who remember him. But this is a promised land, and he will not be mocked nor have his laws and statutes disregarded.

His retribution is sure and is overshadowed only by his mercy.

On Memorial Day, almost fifteen years ago, the house and lot in Cub River were full of aunts and cousins, like the creek itself was brimmed up with winter melt. Some pitched sleek orange and blue nylon tents in the yard; some took their campers up to Willow Flat and came down for the Saturday night bonfire in the yard and the Monday morning breakfast, cooked on a long gas griddle Dad set up under the trees. Breakfast was plenty of lumpy clusters of scrambled eggs, hot cakes the color of tanned leather, little turds of sausage, paper plates bent and damp under maple syrup. The yard was full of little kids walking careful, half bent over with their food in

both hands and gripping paper cups of orange juice in their teeth. The family kick-off to summer.

I was seventeen that summer, eighteen that fall, with enough money saved for one year at Utah State University twenty miles down the road and over the border in Logan, Utah. I was a big man amongst my city cousins. I'd placed third that year in the all-state wrestling tournament and I'd had my own truck since I was fifteen. Every one of my cousins I had fought and every one of them I had beaten, sometimes taking two brothers at a time, and once even after getting busted over the head with an aspen branch. We'd have family on and off at the farm all summer until the deer hunt in the fall, which ended the extended family season on the Whitehall side. Thanksgiving was for my mother's folks, and Christmas was for the family at home.

I kept an eye out that year for my cousin Cherise. She was only a half-cousin, daughter to my uncle's second wife. She'd gone into Logan the night before—talked her mother into letting her take the car—and I had heard her drive in about one o'clock, coasting onto the lawn, and then I heard her crawl into the tent with her little brothers.

She made her way out about eight o'clock, when the noise got so bad the devil couldn't have heard himself cuss. She was wearing jeans with one knee busted out and a striped top that stretched tight around her stomach and small bust, and she walked across the lawn barefoot on the side of her feet and into the house. I sat under a tree eating pancakes and rolling little cousins around the lawn off my feet, waiting for her to come out again.

Two summers before, we'd been out riding, Cherise and me, and while we sat in the spotty shade on a creek bank while the horses drank, she asked me had I ever kissed a girl.

"You haven't," she said when I didn't answer her right off. I had, once, only two weeks before.

I just shrugged.

"Tell me," she said.

"What for?"

"I just was wondering," she said.

I stretched and leaned back on my hands. She tugged her shoes off from the heel without undoing the laces and held one over the creek on one finger.

"Don't drop it," I said.

"Will you go get it if I do?"

"No," I said.

"You won't?"

"No."

"You won't do anything," she said and let go of the shoe. It splashed on top of the water and started to float downstream, a white canvas boat. We watched it bob through some little rapids until it disappeared where the creek made a bend under the low trees. She took the other shoe and began filling it with handfuls of pebbles.

"We're only half-cousins," she said. "Really we're not cousins at all. We aren't even related." She looked at me over her shoulder. She had an angry face that summer, I remember, a small, furious face speckled with dark freckles, thin lips, a baby's nose. She'd gotten sunburned on the farm and was starting to peel.

"So?" I said.

"So you could kiss me if you wanted."

"What for?"

"Just to see what it would be like." She rolled her bottom lip out in half a pout and stared me down.

"Come on," she said. She pulled a white tube with little strawberries printed on it out of her pocket and rolled it over her lips.

"See if you can taste it."

I couldn't quite work things out with how we were sitting, so I stood up. She got up and faced me, and I kissed her like I did my prom date two weeks before, holding her left hand in my right and touching her lips with mine then opening them just a little which made the quietest popping sound.

"That's how you kiss?" she said, her eyes already open when I opened mine.

"So what?" I said, dropping her hand.

"Do this," she said. I pursed my lips out like hers, and she reached up behind my head to pull me down to her. She covered my mouth tight then took my bottom lip in her teeth.

"Do this," she said again and then again. Open your mouth. Breathe in. Go for as long as you can.

She had forbidden knowledge, and as she led I followed. Sometimes she laughed. I was ignorant. I felt it. "Try it again," she'd say, and I would.

"I need my other shoe," she said when we got ready to leave, and I plunged down the middle of the gold-bottomed creek and found it while she squatted on the bank, watching me.

Cherise hadn't come the next Memorial Day. I don't ever remember talking to her mother before, but I tried to be casual when I asked where her daughter was.

"She's got chicken pox," my half-aunt said. "I'd forgot she hadn't ever had them, and when the little kids got them, she followed right along a week later."

"Tell her I said hi," I said.

"I will." Her mom smiled, appreciating any little sign of acceptance, even after two years in the family. "Now which one are you?"

"I'm Dallin," I said. "Joe and Carol's boy."

Cherise came out of the house that morning when I was seventeen rubbing a fist under her nose, and I could tell she had wet down her hair. She had a ragged, spiky haircut that summer, her hair dyed a burnt orange, and five earrings arching in a half-moon up one lobe. I watched from under the tree while she wandered over to get some breakfast, smiling at the aunts and uncles in the stiff way people do in wedding lines and shrugging or nodding when they asked her questions. Gold zippers flapped open at the ankles of her jeans. After she got her food, she walked straight over to me and sat down.

"Hi," she said.

"How were the chicken pox?"

"I don't know," she said, stirring ketchup into her eggs with her fork. "Are you going to the cemetery?"

"Everybody's going."

"I'm not. I don't believe in it."

"In what?"

"Giving people flowers after they're dead." She poked her fork straight up in her stack of pancakes and tossed her plate on the grass. "Do you think they care?"

"I think maybe it's more for the people who're alive," I said, offering her one of my mother's explanations.

"Why? Because they're trying to make up for all the things they didn't say, or all the times they treated somebody bad. They feel guilty, that's all. They're afraid somebody's going to come back and haunt them."

"I don't know," I said. I sat with my arms folded around my knees, looking past the house and up the hills behind it turning green in pine and aspen and scrub oak.

"Are you afraid of ghosts?" she said.

I was, actually. Not the bed-sheet kind that float around in movies, but the real kind that pop up every now and again.

"No," I told her.

"Then let's go for a ride somewhere."

"Somebody's got the horses up High Creek."

"Let's go in your truck then."

"Where?"

"I don't care."

"We can go up to the spring," I said. "You ever been up there?"

"No," she said, "let's go."

I told my dad we were just going up to Willow Flat to see if anybody was still hanging around up there, then maybe we were going to hike to the spring. When he asked, I reminded him that I'd already been to the cemetery the night before and that it would most likely be me going up with my mother again the end of the week to pick up flowers.

"What about Cherise?"

"She doesn't want to go."

"She's like her mother," my dad said. My half-aunt always got lots of complaints, though the way I'd come to see it, it was my uncle that was always badgering at his wife. She didn't fit in with my mother and aunts. They were all country women, heavy and plain-faced, gathering together with their diet pop to gab their talk on camping blankets spread out on the ground. They moved mostly to chase children and fix food, raising to one knee, then pushing themselves up to slowly stand. They were salt of the earth women who knew best how to keep things alive and growing and amongst themselves.

Cherise's mother wore Levis' or pants with matching jackets and white tennis shoes. She worked as a secretary to an executive in Salt Lake City who wasn't a Mormon. Most times she just went along with us on the hikes the other women didn't go on or sat by herself in the car reading a book. She didn't have anything to say to the ladies on the blanket, and try as they might to be neighborly, they had precious little to say to her.

Cherise was her mother's child. Skinny and always looking in from the outside. My aunts talked about her, the trouble she got into, the colors she dyed her hair and the clothes she wore, the tube tops and skin-tight jeans. She wasn't really pretty, I was thinking that morning, walking up the trail to Willow Springs. Her face was all bones, chin and nose, eyes narrow and usually traced in black. She was a scruffy stick girl who wore too much war paint and too many rings.

"Don't you get bored up here?" she said while she skirted around a puddle of mud in the trail, her arms folded because the canyon was still chilly in the shade and we hadn't been walking long enough to warm up.

"No," I said.

"I would."

"Probably. What do you do in the city?"

"Whatever," she said. "Go to movies, sneak into clubs. Drag State Street sometimes."

"There's a lot to do up here. It just depends what you're used to," I said.

"Boring's boring," she said.

In an hour we stood over the spring which fed half the Cub River, watching the water surge up out of the slate-gray limestone, white and cold and violent, left over from the snow last winter. Another branch of the river, fed by another spring, came down the creek up the canyon where we had been two summers before.

"Where's all the water come from?" Cherise said, talking loud over the rushing sound.

"Just from down in the ground."

"Does it ever run dry?"

"Not that I know of. I've never seen it running like this, though." The water pounded in a frothy head, pooling as it spread, then funneling down the rocks into a stream.

Cherise shoved her hand in and winced.

"It's cold."

"Yeah, it's cold."

She swished her hand around, staring up at the gray rock wall that ended the trail and dark pines.

"What's up there?" she said.

"Nothing."

"Have you ever looked?"

"No," I said, then helped her across the stream and up the steep hill on the other side. Above the spring was only rock and trees, quiet forest. The sun stood high through the trees,

and I sat on a rock breathing in the freshness and earth while Cherise looked around.

"You going to college in the fall?" she said.

"Mmmhmm," I nodded.

"Where?"

"Logan."

"It's a party school."

I shrugged. "They've got some good classes."

"I'm going to go back to California and live with my dad after I graduate. I hate it in Utah," she said.

"What's there to do in California?" I said, teasing her.

"Everything." She took off the sweatshirt she had tied around her waist, spread it on the ground, and sat on it, looking up at me.

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"A couple."

"A couple," she laughed and worked her shoes off with her toes. "How many girlfriends have you had?"

"I don't know," I said. "I lose count."

"What kind of girls do you like?"

"I don't know."

"Fat ones?" she said before I could finish.

I shook my head.

"Country girls?" She leaned back on her elbows. "The kind that ride horses?"

"They're all right," I said.

"Are you a virgin?" she said. The sound of the spring was gone, and I felt the sun then, on my back and head, hot and heavy as a skillet. And something else, too. I felt the air around

me stretch tight as drawn elastic and the sum of my life rushing up to that moment. If I didn't tell her, "None of your business" and get up to go, if I didn't ask her about my uncle or her real dad, or why she hated it here so much and wanted to go to California, if I did nothing to stop it, something was going to happen.

She stood up on her sweatshirt, folded her arms in front of her, then stretched up and peeled off her shirt. Then the pants, and then, while I watched and didn't move, what was left. She stood there with her bony little body shivering in the shade and half a crooked smile on her face.

I was powerless by then to do anything else besides what we did. Time passed quickly, then it stopped.

"You don't have to feel guilty," she said to me later. "It's just something you do. You don't have to think it's wrong because somebody told you it was."

"I don't," I said.

What I did feel was nothing I expected. I found myself suddenly with little faith in the rights and wrongs I'd been brought up with when it mattered, and I tried to get her off the trail and back into the trees once more on the hike down. When we reached the campground at Willow Flat, she grabbed the back pocket of my jeans to pull me to a stop and tell me a dirty little secret.

"We ought to go to the cemetery tonight."

"All right," I said, looking into her eyes, which were a washed-out, denim blue I thought was kind of pretty right then. She bit the tip of her tongue between her teeth and smiled.

We didn't go to the cemetery that night. I met her a half-mile down the road with a flashlight and a sleeping bag.

We spent most of the earliest hours of the morning just off the edge of our in-town field, down along the banks of the Cub River, swift and wide with the spring runoff, and the air around us cold on our bodies from coming off the water.

I never did go down to Salt Lake that summer to see Cherise like I said I would. I came face to face with what we'd done the night after she left. I sat on a fence post as the long shadows spread across the barnyard and squared off to look my black deed in the eye and myself in the heart. All my life, this had been taught to me as sin, to use God's gift outside of marriage and to flaunt his law. This was a part of what made God, God—who and what he was.

What I decided though, was that if Cherise were there that night, we would most likely be down the road again rolling in the weeds. Thinking about it sometimes made me wish she were and led to replacing Cherise in my mind with half a dozen other girls. It became a game that summer. I never did take another girl up to Willow Flat, but I knew this was not contrition. When I was ready to say one way or another, I'd get back to God and let him know. Until then, I set aside my guilt and excused my sin because I was not ready to believe.

This might change the course of life that I and everyone around had planned for me, but without faith, there was no purpose in that plan, no reason for that life, only hypocrisy and a certain discomfort born of spirit.

At college, I reasoned, when I was on my own, I would decide.

At the end of the summer, before I had started school, I heard whispers that Cherise had gotten pregnant. This

surprised nobody. It was nothing my folks ever mentioned to me, and I couldn't say now where I heard it. Maybe off the edge of the front porch, maybe coming around the corner of the house, maybe walking through the kitchen with my plate.

I sat out in the tractor shed the day the wind blew the news my way, having never heard words sounding more like the final crack of doom, and I woke up to knowing then that what had happened between me and Cherise was not something private, but something I had been trying to hide. If I'd had a friend in the world to tell about it, he would have come to my defense and said under the circumstances, how could I know the child was even mine, the way she acted up there on Willow Flat.

"You weren't the first. How many guys have had her, Dallin?" a friend would have said, if he'd been there. No friend was, so I said it to myself, bitter, watching the red sun spread wide before it sunk down behind the mountains across the valley.

I could marry my cousin, if it came to that. She wasn't a relative by blood. We could do it on the way to California, go and not come back. I spent days willing that morning back, but it didn't come, and I went from sick to scared, and then defiant.

I figured, as best as I could, I would be a man about things. But first I had to know.

The football season started before school did, and I went down to Salt Lake the night Utah State played the University of Utah to look for Cherise. I knew she went to a high school called East, and when I found it, just down the hill from the university, the block was filling up with cars and school kids

coming to a high school game. A man at the gate charged me a dollar, and I wandered in to scan the bleachers.

Cherise wasn't hard to find. She sat high up in a far corner, surrounded by a little clump of girls who looked just like her, all of them in tight jeans and stretch tops or t-shirts, all of them with their eyes black with heavy pencil and their lipstick orange or a bruised purple. We'd had them at my school, a few. Later, tonight, they'd be off somewhere smoking cigarettes and trying to find someone to buy them beer. This is what you'd think. Really, they might be at the victory stomp after the game just hanging around the bleachers instead of dancing, with sloppy guys in blown-out sneakers and aftershave.

I worked my way in behind her, sat down, and tapped her on the shoulder. She turned her body around to face me without saying anything. Her eyes were rimmed in red and looked more like the eyes of an albino rabbit than a high school girl.

"Hi," I said.

"Hi," she answered after she looked me over. "Hey," she said to her friends, "it's my farmer cousin." Then she turned back to me.

"Hi," she said again. "Whatcha doin'?"

"I'm down here for the Utah game."

"It's over there," she said, pointing towards the mountains and the university stadium.

"I know it," I said. "I wanted to talk to you."

She lifted one shoulder in half a shrug. The band started in on the school song, and the crowd got up to cheer while the team ran on from a corner of the field.

"You hungry?" I yelled over the noise.

"No," she said.

"Come with me for a minute."

She picked up a little red purse from between her feet and told the girl next to her that she'd be back. We threaded our way through the stands of people with their hands over their hearts, singing, "Oh say can you see . . ."

"Where do you want to go?" Cherise said when we got out to my truck.

"Just here," I said. It came to me then that I hadn't thought of how I was going to ask her. Maybe I thought she would be relieved to see me, that she'd been waiting to see if I would show. Maybe she'd even be mad. I figured if there was anything to tell, it was her who had something to say to me.

"Get in."

She climbed in the cab and rolled down the window while I sat there fingering my keys.

"We going somewhere or not?" she said. She turned the side mirror in and examined one of her eyes. She looked like she'd be the same bony old girl under her t-shirt. She didn't look any bigger, though you wouldn't have to be showing after three months.

"I guess not."

"Well what do you want, then?"

"Just wanted to know how you were doing."

"I'm not doing anything. I never do anything."

"I heard you were pregnant," I said. I had my hands locked on the wheel, staring down at the Ford symbol on the silver cup of the horn in the center of the wheel.

"From who?" she said in a scratchy voice.

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember. Is that all your family has to do is talk about me?"

"No," I said.

"It sounds like it. So what did you come here for?"

"To find out," I said.

"Why, are you scared?"

"I just want to know."

Cherise slumped back into the seat with her feet spread and popped open the jockey box.

"What are you going to do?"

"I thought of a couple things."

"Like what?"

"It depends. Are you?" I said.

She slapped the jockey box closed and opened the door.

"No," she said.

"You're not?"

"No."

"It's just what I heard," I said as she slammed the door. She spun around and leaned into the open window.

"Well if I was, I'm not now." She stared at me, with the tip of her tongue bit in her teeth and her eyes red with veins like hot electric wires, until I looked down. Then she bolted across the street, dodging traffic, her little purse flapping off her shoulder like she had a live bird trapped inside.

I didn't go to the football game that night. I drove back toward home, then turned off up Logan Canyon. I left my truck at a place called Tony's Grove and hiked in the moonlight over the ridges and high mountain saddles until I

came to a little lake, a pine-green puddle below the lip of a ridge at the top of High Creek Canyon. There was an old raft, wrecked along the shore, and I sat with my feet against it and my back toward a meadow, watching the moon making its way toward the west.

There are things that cannot ever be undone, and that night, huddled cold there on a mountaintop, I was not free, and I was not thankful.

Later, as I confessed my sin to a man I had known all my life, he looked at me with wet eyes and compassion as I told him, then said to me, "You don't know, then, if she was or wasn't, do you?"

"No," I said.

Later, he asked, "And this is not something you would have encouraged her to do? Never something you would have suggested or consented to?"

"No." As near as I knew myself, this was an honest answer.

"We'll leave it there, then," he said, and he stood up from where he sat with me in his own living room, with the doors shut and his family told to let us be for a little while, and he put his arms around me.

"You've walked a hard road," he told me at last. "But God will forgive."

My uncle divorced again, by the end of the next year, and the last I knew of Cherise, she went back to California with her mother. I've since married a Benson girl, from over in Downey, and we've raised a house to the square now in Cub River, across the road from the in-town field, and have three little boys. She takes her place on the blankets spread on the lawns amongst women the likes of which she has known all

her life, a country wife. I told her, before we married, that I had sown my wild oats but that I would never be unfaithful. One thing I held back.

Some would say it's too simple to see in the consequences of your sins God's hand and justice. But faith begins as a point of view. And when the river runs high and wide in the late spring, I feel the stone left in my heart, though it is smaller now and worn smoother over time.

### **Tell Me Tomorrow**

Old Saul  
of the numbered mornings  
came seeking her  
disguised  
through the dark.  
"Bring me him up."  
he said.  
And she, in vision,  
"I see gods ascending  
out of the earth,  
and one comes up  
wrapped in a mantle!"  
Knowing, Saul  
stooped his face  
to the waiting ground  
and wept,  
"Tell me tomorrow!"

E. LEON CHIDESTER

Why ask?  
The splattered blood  
of your sons, dropped  
in mid-flight,  
will map a quiet hillside  
where your sword  
will open pages of  
the ribbed book  
of your chest  
and read out words  
written on the edges  
of your heart.

Then she of En-dor  
lifted him like a dog,  
dumb with terror  
and swore,  
“I have laid my life  
in my hand  
and now,  
by these gods  
that rise,  
you will take strength  
to bear the life  
I have laid in yours.”

TELL ME TOMMOROW

And she took flour,  
kneaded, baked  
and brought bread  
before old Saul  
and sent him out to die.

*E. Leon Chidester*

## Author's Prefatory Note

First written roughly twenty and ten years ago, respectively, and now somewhat updated, these two (slightly overlapping) essays made early forays into the then relatively unexplored territory of Mormon fiction reading: Mormons reading fiction, and sometimes reading "Mormon fiction." A lot of the updating and some of the fun happens in the notes, which of course try to acknowledge my intellectual and textual debts and, sometimes more importantly, the voices I've been heeding, the ears I think I'm talking to. (Readers irritated by notes should spare them until they reach the end of each essay.)

The essays follow from my earlier "Digging the Foundation" (cited in text) and prepare the ground (more campsite than arable field, so far) for the later "Element and Glory" and "Smaller Canvas of the Mormon Short Story," and for my 1991 AML Address, "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say" (cited below), and they relate laterally or "archipelagically" to numerous other essays and reviews, published and unpublished, my own and those of others exploring the same terrain (see the forthcoming collection *Tending the Garden* [Salt Lake City: Signature, 1996], edited by Eugene England and Lavina Fielding Anderson).

As parts of a prolonged ongoing "project" in "Mormon literary criticism," which figures itself out as it goes on, I mean the essays to be both "learned" and "personal" (the second essay here admits a distinctly more personal tone), and above all to take what I hope is a useful part in a wider discussion among (mainly) LDS readers, writers, and literary critics. I'm grateful now that, thanks to *Wasatch Review International*, both will, for the first time, see a longer light of day.

# Heritage of Hostility: The Mormon Attack on Fiction in the 19th Century

B. W. Jorgensen

"Leonard Fox, if you don't stop reading them trashy novels day after day, you'll go clean crazy."

**T**hus beginneth a cautionary tale in the LDS *Young Woman's Journal* of 1889, warning against the evils of fiction. And it is simply one parting shot of a prolonged Mormon attack on novels and novel-reading in the mid-19th century. Indeed, Gean Clark in her BYU master's thesis (1935) saw this story, "Whatsoever a Man Soweth," as marking an important turning point in a Mormon "distrust of fiction" that extended from roughly 1850 to 1888, for even as the tale ends and Leonard Fox has recovered from his insanity—though like a reformed alcoholic "he never dares

---

B. W. Jorgensen teaches, reads, and writes at (or near) BYU, and lives in Provo with (or near) his wife, children, increasingly numerous grandchildren, and mother. He and his unaccountable twin Wayne occasionally publish poems, short fiction, and literary criticism.

read a story or novel. Not even the very best"—the narrator warns us that Leonard "goes to excess" and that "young people should read novels and stories written by our own people with the proper lessons taught therein." With this story, Clark pointed out, we have moved into the period of "Home Literature" promoted by Orson F. Whitney in his oft-quoted address to the YMMIA Conference in 1888.<sup>1</sup> Yet so potent had been the rhetoric of attack, that even so pious and well-meaning a maker of "home literature" as Nephi Anderson could still sound anxious, as late as 1898 (when he was about to publish *Added Upon*), to justify his vocation as a writer of stories and novels:

I enter a plea for fiction, the good, the pure, the elevating kind. . . . You distinguish between drawings, praising the beautiful and condemning and shunning the evil. Consistency claims that you do the same with the products of the pen.

Again, some, who strictly exclude every work of fiction from the home, admit the newspaper. . . . Facts may be debasing, fiction may be elevating. Jesse James was a reality, Adam Bede was not.

. . . Of [Christ] it is said: "But without a parable spoke he not unto them." . . .

Yes, the world reads fiction. If one has a message to deliver, he puts it into a novel, into a living breathing thing.<sup>2</sup>

Many of us no doubt share this concern that good fiction may have been blasted along with bad. A short replay of some of the artillery barrages may help us understand what made the unexceptionable Anderson so anxious, and it may help us discern and dispel the battle-smoke that still clouds many Mormons' attitudes toward fiction.

Brigham Young himself, for instance, made the somewhat parenthetical remark in a sermon on the city of Enoch that novels are "falsehoods got up expressly to excite the minds of

## H E R I T A G E O F H O S T I L I T Y

youth."<sup>3</sup> But the field marshall of the campaign was surely George Q. Cannon, in his calling as editor of the *Juvenile Instructor*. Chapter VI of Lawrence R. Flake's M.R.E. thesis (BYU 1969) gathers so many choice quotations that we can fairly hear the shells scream. In 1870 Cannon wrote:

Let children have such reading [as novels], and it will not be long before the plain truth will not satisfy them. Their appetites will be spoiled for it, they will grow up novel readers. This habit of novel-reading is very common these days, and is the cause of many of the evils which prevail in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly "novel reader" has become a term of opprobrium, and novel-reading might rank somewhere close to card-playing in the list of vices. Again, in 1881 Cannon warns,

If you value your children's future, banish novels from your habitations. Discourage the reading of fiction. It deadens the mind; destroys the memory; it wastes valuable time; it warps the imagination; it conveys wrong impressions; it distracts the person indulging in it from the important things of life.<sup>5</sup>

Cannon and his cohorts viewed novel-reading as a kind of addictive drug, such that "the novel appetite being once formed, it craves all." Or again it was a forerunner of demonic influence: "Where the novel writer leaves off, the devil commences." In a neat phrase, it was "literary dram-drinking," a "disease" that might pull its victim into "too intimate contact with the 'prince of Beelzebub.'"<sup>6</sup>

In 1871 Cannon printed the testimony of one near-victim who saved herself in time and with perseverance. Sister Emma Fowler warned the Salt Lake 20th Ward Young Ladies' Retrenchment Association that

Fiction feeds the imagination and carries us away from real life as it exists and as we shall have to meet it, until realities grow distasteful and we do not relish them. . . . I believe that many a poor woman in the world has ruined her health by pining and fretting over her supposed hard lot—waiting and

watching for something that would never come if she lived to the age of Methuselah—she concludes that life is a miserable mistake and there is nothing worth living for; and all through a disordered imagination produced by novels.<sup>7</sup>

Well, here I stand: a novel-reader—disordered (and warped) imagination, dead mind, destroyed memory. But I am also something of an historical scholar, and whenever I see a text I want to know what its context is. Etymologically, “context” means “weaving together”: I want to know what these patches of text are woven together with in the 19th century; that may tell us more of what they mean. The context, it turns out, is not hard to discover, and it helps us see that Mormons did not originate the attack on fiction and that its specific targets were altogether worthy of attack, though the resultant side-effects are deplorable.

The American “Censure of Fiction” (as G. Harrison Orians called it in 1937) first flourished between 1789 and 1810,<sup>8</sup> but the rhetoric of the attack hardly changed at all throughout the 19th century, though it did intensify toward the middle of the century. No less a figure of the American Enlightenment than Thomas Jefferson joined the fray; writing in 1818 to Nathaniel Burwell, he remarked on “the inordinate passion prevalent for novels” that

When this poison infects the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. Nothing can engage attention unless dressed in all the figments of fancy, and nothing so bedecked comes amiss. The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.<sup>9</sup>

And Jefferson was joined by other luminaries such as Timothy Dwight, Noah Webster, and Benjamin Rush.<sup>10</sup> As late as 1891, William Dean Howells could quote similar

## HERITAGE OF HOSTILITY

sentiments from a “confession of novel-reading” by General Grant (also a notorious dram-drinker):

Whatever in my mental make-up is wild and visionary, whatever is untrue, whatever is injurious, I can trace to the perusal of some work of fiction. Worse than that, they beget such high-strung and super-sensitive ideas of life that plain industry and plodding perseverance are despised, and matter-of-fact poverty, or every-day, commonplace distress, meets with no sympathy, if indeed noticed at all, by one who has wept over the impossibly accumulated sufferings of some gaudy hero or heroine.<sup>11</sup>

With such rhetoric so widespread throughout the century, it’s hard to tell whether Jefferson was a source or an echo of language already abundantly in the air by 1818. G. H. Orians cites a writer in the *American Monthly Magazine* for 1824 who looked back on the earlier American attack:

To us it appears but yesterday, that the grave, the serious, the religious and the prudent considered novel-reading as an employment utterly beneath the dignity of the human mind. . . . Those who had sons would have supposed them forever incapacitated for any useful pursuit in life if they exhibited an inclination for novel reading; and those who had daughters who exhibited such an inclination would have considered them as totally unfitted for ever becoming good wives or mothers; and if they found, after due attempts at correction, that the evil was incurable, lest the report of it should ruin the young lady’s marriage prospects, they uniformly endeavored to keep it as profoundly secret, as they would her exhibiting a propensity to dram-drinking. (197)

In the *Massachusetts Magazine* of November 1791, a contributor had deplored the “fatal consequences which result from such chimerical works” as novels, romances, and so forth, and concluded that “everyone knows what an effect the general style of Novels has on untutored minds; they are written with an intent to captivate the feelings, and do in fact

lead many on to the path of vice, from an idea that they are within the pale of gallantry" (Oriens 198).

That judgment and its language, then, were in the air long before Brigham Young and George Q. Cannon used them. In 1801 a correspondent to a magazine named *The Toilet* had declared that the "grand aim" of foreign romantic fiction "is the extinction of sublime and virtuous sentiments and the overthrow of all moral principles" and that reading it "robs the common incidents of life of half their charms, and renders insipid that which is calculated for your greatest good" (Oriens 199). This kind of attack had been going on for a long time and is not gospel original at all, though in a Mormon context it might take on some new and different meanings.<sup>12</sup>

If we investigate Anglo-American popular literature from about 1830 to 1890, we begin to see what it was that Mormons needed to attack from about 1850 on. By the late 1820s and early 1830s cheap printing had become readily available in both England and America, and people began publishing penny newspapers for the working classes. There was an incredible market there, and publishers recognized that they could capture it if they wanted to, so they tried. And from the early 1840s on, the garbage just poured: story papers, novels issued in penny installments week by week, tabloid newspapers reporting violence and sexual crimes—all basically exploiting sensation for profit.<sup>13</sup> This sort of historical "hum and buzz of implication"<sup>14</sup> is marvelously summarized in Frank Luther Mott's multivolume *History of American Magazines* (1957); Margaret Dalziel's *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* (1957) is fine on British fiction; and Mott's *Golden Multitudes* (1947), a history of best-sellers, is particularly good, too. If we want to know the context, if we want to know who the Jacqueline Susanns and Harold Robbinses were in the 19th century, this is where to find out.<sup>15</sup>

The notorious dime novels, the best-sellers in regular hardbound form—all are summarized here, all the themes and the stock situations and characters.

One thing we learn from such studies is what any reader who has begun to form his taste on the classics might suspect already: the bulk of popular fiction at any time is junk. Who now can remember the most popular book of 1970? I met a student at that time who thought Erich Segal's *Love Story* (New York: Harper, 1970) would endure for a hundred years, maybe outlast Fitzgerald and Hemingway, but I think people have already forgotten it (though Jack Weyland may fairly be said to have launched a career in popular Mormon fiction by remembering it). It's trivial. The bulk of popular fiction is always going to be trivial, shallow, sensationalistic, exploitative, pandering to the lowest common denominator of popular sentiment at the time, or trying to create a new popular sentiment.<sup>16</sup> And such fiction always deserves the disdain of cultivated readers and the denunciation of prophets. Perhaps its only saving grace is that without it, the best fiction might not stand out so clearly. Perhaps there must needs be opposition in this thing, too.

At any rate, once we refresh our sense of the context of mid-19th century popular fiction, we may recognize definite clues in our Mormon diatribes that point to quite specific targets. George Albert Smith in 1872, for instance, attacked "twenty-five cent yellow covered literature"<sup>17</sup>: except for the price, that would seem to identify Beadle's dime novels, which were published with yellow paper bindings, though there were plenty of other series also issued that way, enough that "yellow-back" was a common phrase. Mott tells us that yellow-backs were essentially cheap, sensationalistic, exciting stories, written for a mass market, never meant to last very

long, sold in enormous quantities to enormous numbers of people.<sup>18</sup>

Another clue: George Q. Cannon in 1874 attacked the "story papers."<sup>19</sup> That's another common phrase, a key term; Mott informs us that "story papers" were usually four-to eight-page newspapers, published weekly or biweekly, full of fiction, usually lurid, sensational, or sentimental.<sup>20</sup> Another *Juvenile Instructor* contributor writing in 1875 under the pseudonym of "Rolo" describes customers waiting downtown on Saturday night for papers to arrive, and then all standing around reading them "by the light of the shop windows."<sup>21</sup> Here again, Mott will tell us about "Sunday papers" and "Saturday papers," which were written to capture the reading time of the average American on Sunday, when he didn't have to work. So these papers came out on Saturday. Some were church-related or religiously oriented, but most were quite secular.<sup>22</sup> There were all of these workers with nothing to do, pocket change, and no T.V. yet—so, get mass-produced reading matter out to them.

In the same piece, "Rolo" discusses the heroes and heroines of this fiction, and drops the best clues of all: "Scarcely a novel written but there is a beautiful woman in it, with cheeks like roses (painted, of course) ["painted" connotes "harlot" here], teeth like pearls etc., and where they get all the beautiful women from passes my comprehension."<sup>23</sup> For a wry footnote on that, recall Mark Twain's wisecrack in *Roughing It* that "the man that marries one [Mormon woman] has done an act of Christian charity which entitles him to the kindly applause of mankind, not their harsh censure—and the man that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence."<sup>24</sup> More seriously, and more to the point, bear in mind that by

1875 more than 35,000 British converts had emigrated to Utah, and that virtually all were from the middle and working classes and hence likely to have had their reading appetites whetted on the work of British writers like G. W. M. Reynolds, whom Margaret Dalziel discusses as "The Most Popular Writer of Our Time," and who had a peculiarly marked fascination with "snowy bosoms" and "that voluptuous fullness which could not be compressed."<sup>25</sup> And of course heroines of incomprehensible beauty and good fortune populated such smash best-sellers as Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Maria Cummins's *Lamplighter* (1854) (parodied by James Joyce in the "Nausicaa" chapter of *Ulysses*). All these and more like them are treated by Margaret Dalziel, who includes a chapter on "The Heroine"; by Mott in *Golden Multitudes*; and by Fred Lewis Pattee in *The Feminine Fifties*, which surveys the "damned mob of scribbling women" that Hawthorne complained had monopolized the reading public.<sup>26</sup>

"Rolo" had sufficient cause to fire his Great Basin barrage, and having finished off the heroine, he goes on to the hero: "If it is not a love story, it is a recital of some poor, ragged urchin, whom some kind, old, benevolent gentleman picks up out of the gutter."<sup>27</sup> There we get close enough to see the whites of the enemy's eyes, for "Rolo" can have none other in mind than Rev. Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868). Or, since Alger could write a book in two weeks and publish three to five a year, it may have been one of a score or so epigones of *Dick* available by 1875—*Mark, the Match Boy*; *Phil, the Fiddler*; et al.<sup>28</sup> In the stock Alger plot, a ragged but honest and industrious urchin makes his way to riches, usually after being befriended by "some kind, old, benevolent gentleman" (in *Dick's* case it was a Mr. Whitney; and then, as Richard Hunter, *Dick* in turn uplifts *Mark, the Match Boy*). The

crowning irony of "Rolo's" blast at *Ragged Dick* and all of his urchin cousins is that Mormon culture in the 20th century (like American culture generally) has so thoroughly assimilated the Alger myth of success.<sup>29</sup>

In all the Mormon denunciations of fiction I have examined, whenever there are any clues to specific targets, those clues invariably point to the popular trash of the times, from the lowest and most ephemeral story papers and yellowbacks to the more "respectable" but still shallow, sensational or sentimental best-sellers of authors like Alger. I half wish the attack on that kind of fiction had succeeded, except that, as Nephi Anderson's "Plea for Fiction" hints, the attack tended to rout the best along with the worst, to blast George Eliot's Adam Bede as heavily as the dime-novel desperadoes or the rags-to-riches Dicks. But in my view the most regrettable side effect of the campaign was that it—and its "home literature" aftermath—tended to confirm and perpetuate in the Mormon audience a set of unexamined assumptions about fiction and its reading. Such assumptions may have had much to do with the poor literary quality of most fiction in Church publications, and with the difficulty serious Mormon writers still have in reaching an audience within the Church.<sup>30</sup>

George Q. Cannon reveals one such assumption in the 1882 *Instructor* when, in the context of a positive assertion that Mormons ought to produce literature, he asks, "Where can a people be found whose history so abounds with startling and thrilling dramatic scenes, from which to draw subjects for epic writing?"<sup>31</sup> As if the excitement of grand historical spectacle were the primary emotion available in fiction, the only response alive in the audience. (One wants to invoke Wordsworth's Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* [1800] here: "the human mind is capable of being

excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants.") Granted, Cannon may not have been far wrong about the taste of the audience and the epic potential of Mormon history; and Mormon or Mormon-rooted writers from Vardis Fisher, Virginia Sorensen, and Maurine Whipple in the 1930s and 1940s to Orson Scott Card and Gerald Lund in the 1980s and 1990s have taken up that epic subject matter, and not merely for its epic excitements. But if we assume that "startling and thrilling dramatic scenes" are what is available and desired, we are hewing wood and carrying water for the enemy, helping to make every bad thing the Mormon critics said about the "disease" of novel-reading come true. Of course, those who have learned to read Austen, Hawthorne, Eliot, Tolstoy, and other classic novelists know that fiction, like the other arts, can educate and enrich the life of feeling and moral perception.<sup>32</sup> But when bad readers read bad fiction badly, it is time to start the cannons firing.

A second and perhaps more dangerous assumption is betrayed in Cannon's proposal in 1871 that "when [children] read [the] lives [of noble and virtuous human beings] and become familiar with their actions, they have a wish to be like them."<sup>33</sup> This is the assumption that what we casually call "identification" will, or even should, lead to emulation. This simplistic vision of the moral effect of literature might be safe enough if goodness were always as attractive and exciting as badness. But identification and emulation can prove disastrous. Supposedly the Earl of Essex was inspired by a simplistic response to Shakespeare's *Richard II* to attempt his unfortunate rebellion against Elizabeth.<sup>34</sup> It's as if Socrates came back to say "I told you so."<sup>35</sup> The normative poetic instance might be Canto 5 of Dante's *Inferno*: the pathetic story of Paolo and Francesca, two adulterous lovers whirling forever in the wind that blows around the second circle.

Francesca tells Dante that she and Paolo were reading of how Lancelot kissed Guinevere, and then Paolo kissed Francesca's "mouth all trembling," and "that day we read no farther."<sup>36</sup> Clearly they have imitated the fictional characters to their own damnation. Crudely or literally understood, "identification" is dangerous, and "imitation" may be death. Ideally, I think, what happens when a good reader reads good fiction is a sort of *immersion* in an imagined, verbally created experience that, as Arthur Mizener once wrote, gives us "the nearest thing we have to the moral effect of experience itself under the ideal conditions which experience never provides, when we can understand it fully and face all its moral implications."<sup>37</sup> We emerge from that imagined experience to return to our own actual experience—free, responsible, and perhaps, if we have read well, more subtly and acutely aware of that experience and its possible choices or imperatives. Surely we ought not to emerge from reading to play out roles that are not ourselves, in a world that is not the author's nor the characters'.

Possibly related to our crude and risky assumptions about identification and emulation is the assumption that depiction is advocacy. One summer I heard a Church magazine editor explain that certain things were taboo in the *Ensign* and *New Era* because the mere mention of a subject might, to some in the audience, seem to condone or advocate it. Such extreme caution may well be a wise policy for the Church magazines; but of course for the Church audience to assume that a writer always or necessarily approves of, or "promotes," what he portrays is to read badly indeed. The recent extreme example in Mormon culture is the anonymous attack on Brian Evenson's story collection *Altmann's Tongue* (New York: Knopf, 1994), with its aghast "hope that Brian never starts practicing what he preaches, and that none of his readers do

either"<sup>38</sup>—as if it were simply obvious that the acts of cruelty depicted in some of the stories are endorsed by the writer.

Mormons have a culturally instilled and perpetuated preference for "uplift" and didacticism, for what Nephi Anderson called "the good, the pure, the elevating kind" of fiction, "with the proper lessons taught therein."<sup>39</sup> Flannery O'Connor, a devout Catholic and also a writer whose stories sometimes depict violence, tells of a letter informing her that "when the tired reader comes home at night, he wishes to read something that will lift up his heart." Apparently Miss O'Connor's stories had not lifted this lady's heart; but O'Connor remarks, "I think that if her heart had been in the right place, it would have been lifted up."<sup>40</sup> If we sentimentally insist on fiction that depicts only "the more smiling aspects of life" (and even Howells, who coined that phrase, did not live by it),<sup>41</sup> we deny the tragic implications of a gospel that teaches us that the loving Father of all has already lost, irrevocably, a third of his children, and that, to be the God he is, he chooses to leave the other two thirds free enough to damn themselves and thus risk their loss too; so Enoch saw God weeping in eternity for "the workmanship of [his] own hands," to whom he "gave . . . agency."<sup>42</sup> If we insist on a Pollyanna vision of experience, the gospel as Glad Game, we ignore Joseph Smith's resonant testimony: "Thy mind, O, man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss. . . ."<sup>43</sup> We ignore the image of the Christ who "descended below all things" and was "lifted up upon the cross" that he might thus "draw all men unto" himself.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, I think that our heritage of mistaken or unexamined assumptions about fiction adds up to a positive distrust of the imaginative use of the word. The relatively obscure but classic treatment of this problem in American

literature is Hawthorne's abandoned "Story Teller" project. The surviving fragments of this projected frame for many of Hawthorne's early tales reveal its ground plan: a trifling youth leaves the care of his guardian, Parson Thumpcushion, and goes out into the world to become a wandering storyteller; on the road he takes up with another wanderer, Eliakim Abbott, an itinerant Methodist minister.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, then, the frivolous man of the fictive word, who has his audience rolling in the aisles at the mere mention of "Mr. Higginbotham"; on the other, the thoroughly earnest (and thoroughly obtuse) man of the converting and saving word. It becomes clear that Hawthorne intends his storyteller (partly) as a parodic image of the way the audience of the 1830s viewed the writer of fiction: not being a man of the converting word, the fiction writer could only be regarded as trifling. Yet it also becomes clear, when we envision such tales as "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," "Young Goodman Brown," or "The Minister's Black Veil" set into this frame, that Hawthorne is staking out for himself that territory of the imaginative word which, though it does not pretend to convert or save, is entirely serious and worthy of serious reading.

That is the territory within which I value fiction. Our earnest Mormon authorities in the 19th century seem to me entirely right in their campaign against bad readers reading bad fiction badly. But how many Mormon readers, as a result of that campaign, have gone "clean crazy" like Leonard Fox? And what of good readers reading good fiction well?

## Notes

1. Gean Clark, "A Survey of Early Mormon Fiction," M.A. Thesis BYU 1935: 9, 13-14, 15-16. Whitney's address was published in *The Contributor* 9 (1888) 297-301, then in Whitney's *Poetical Works* (1889), and has been reprinted in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo: BYU Press, 1974) 203-207.
2. "A Plea for Fiction," *Improvement Era* 1 (January 1898) 186-188; quoted in Clark 17. Given the dates, this essay and its sequel in the next issue, "Purpose in Fiction" (269-71), do look strongly like strategic statements laid down to pave the way for *Added Upon*, which has enjoyed so many "editions" (most of them reprintings) that it's hard to believe it ever needed a way paved. Anderson's statements also, to my cursory view, seem to share some language with William Dean Howells' *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), cited below; someone might look into this. Anderson will be surprised to hear D. H. Lawrence agreeing with his "living breathing thing," but in "Why the Novel Matters" Lawrence praises the novel for its power to "make the whole man-alive tremble" because "only in the novel are all things given full play (*Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985] 195, 198). Lawrence of course would not have liked the "message put into" component of Anderson's fictional theory, though he himself succumbed to that temptation.
3. *Journal of Discourses* 15.222 (9 October 1872) (hereafter cited as JD). As late as 1877 Brigham Young advised one of his sons to "avoid works of fiction" which "engender mental carelessness and give a slipshod character to the workings of the mind." See Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to his Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret 1974) 314. Stephen Kent Ehat's article on this subject, "How to Condemn Noxious Novels, by Brigham Young," *Century* 2 1.4 (Dec 1976) 36-48, is thorough, entertaining, and copiously illustrated with period graphics and quotations.

4. *Juvenile Instructor* 5 (8 Jan 1870) 4 (hereafter cited as JI); quoted in Lawrence R. Flake, "The Development of the Juvenile Instructor under George Q. Cannon . . .," M.R.E. Thesis BYU 1969: 60.
5. JI 16 (15 Apr 1881) 115; quoted in Flake 60.
6. The quoted phrases occur in Clark 9-10, 11-12.
7. JI 6 (15 April 1871) 58. Clark 12-13 quotes the piece in full.
8. "Censure of Fiction in American Romances and Magazines," *PMLA* 52 (1937) 195-214.
9. Quoted in Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 6.
10. Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel, 1793-1903* (New York: New York UP, 1983, 1985) 4.
11. Quoted by William Dean Howells in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891); see the substantial selection reprinted in *Selected American Prose: The Realistic Movement, 1841-1900*, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Holt, 1958, 1967) 291, 292. General Grant strikes a more archaic note here than he may have known: in his *Confessions* 1.13 [20] (c. 397-400 CE), St. Augustine castigated himself for weeping "over Dido's death . . . when all the while amid such things, dying to you, O God my life, I most wretchedly bore myself about with dry eyes"; see the translation by John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 56.
12. Gordon Thomasson has suggested to me that Mormons may have condemned mid-century fiction because Mormons had quickly become stock villains in so many popular novels. See Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: the Image of Mormonism in 19th Century American Literature," *Western Humanities Review* 22.3 (Summer 1968) 243-260; "The Missouri and Illinois Mormons in Ante-Bellum Fiction," *Dialogue* 5.1 (Spring 1970) 37-50; and Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormonism: Views from Without and Within," *BYU Studies* 14.2 (Winter 1974) 140-153, esp. 143-148. Thomasson's suggestion, however, could account only in part for the attack; the causes must be both broader and deeper. Where the American censure of fiction appears to be a genteel (and nationalistic) rejection of something (often foreign) perceived as

dangerous to manners and morals, the Mormon attack seems more a rejection of a "Gentile" influence perceived as a threat to the spiritual cohesion of a theocratic community. As Richard J. Cummings remarked when this paper was read at the first meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 4 October 1976, the Mormon attack on fiction coincides with the period of most intense Mormon isolationism. I would add that this isolationism has more than just social or political dimensions: it can be suggested that in settling the Great Basin, Brigham Young was attempting to create a sacred culture (his famous remark, "This is the right place"; his early selection of a temple site, an *axis mundi*; the rebaptism of the pioneer company—all these are structural clues). Last, it seems ironic that the language of the attack on fiction, borrowed from the "Gentile" culture, demonstrates the (at least partial) failure of the isolationism.

13. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1957) 1.340-43; Margaret Dalziel, *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* (London: Cohen and West, 1957) 5-20; Mott, *Golden Multitudes* (New York: Macmillan, 1947) 76-79.
14. The phrase is Lionel Trilling's, from "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" in *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Viking, 1950) 206.
15. On Ms. Susann, see the recent article by her one-time editor Michael Korda, "Wasn't She Great?" in the *New Yorker* 14 August 1995: 66-72. Korda offers reasons for taking Susann as an originator of what Thomas Whiteside called, in a book title, *The Blockbuster Complex* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1981); Whiteside also cites Susann's "pioneering" (25) or "trailblazing" (35) on the frontiers of authorially self-promoted bestsellerdom.
16. In its summer fiction issues for 1994 and 1995, the *New Yorker* has featured review-essays on current and past best-sellers that make instructive and (sometimes ruefully) amusing reading. See Anthony Lane, "The Top Ten," *New Yorker* 27 June and 4 July 1994: 79-92; and "Warring Fictions," *New Yorker* 26 June and 3 July 1995: 60-73.
17. JI 7 (28 Sep 1872) 154; quoted in Flake 62.
18. *Golden Multitudes* 149-151; *History* 2.466-68.
19. JI 9 (24 Oct 1874) 253; quoted in Flake 63.

20. *History* 2.33-38; 3.42-45, 178-79, and plate facing 158 (a typically lurid cover from *The Boys of New York*).

21. *JI* 10 (20 Mar 1875) 62; quoted in Flake 63.

22. Mott, loc. cit.

23. *JI* 10 (20 Mar 1875) 62; quoted in Flake 64.

24. As quoted in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1973) 346.

25. Dalziel *Popular Fiction*, 35-45, esp. 37-38. Statistics on British convert emigration to Utah may be found in P. A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965) 144-45, 249; Taylor's classification of the emigrants by occupation (150) shows that about 89% were "workers" and about 11% belonged to the middle classes.

26. See Dalziel *Popular Fiction*, 84-98; Mott, *Golden Multitudes* 122-132; Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: Appleton, 1940) 110-129.

27. *JI* 10 (20 Mar 1875): 62; quoted in Flake 64.

28. Mott, *Golden Multitudes* 158-59; John Tebbel, *From Rags to Riches* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 228-230.

29. Was it Ernest L. Wilkinson who, in my own lifetime and somewhat shaky memory, once received the Alger Award? It is not nice of me to report this, but alas, the Rev. Alger's predilection for boys was not purely literary, according to Edwin P. Hoyt's *Horatio's Boys* (Radnor, PA: Chilton, 1974): "For it was boys, boys, boys that interested the Reverend Mr. Alger"; accused of "buggering" several boys in his parish, he "did not deny the charges. He had been 'imprudent,' he said" (qtd. in *The Oxford Book of American Literary Anecdotes*, ed. Donald Hall [New York: Oxford UP, 1981] 106-07).

30. Karl Keller raised this problem, and discussed several of the assumptions I will deal with, in "On Words and the Word of God: The Delusions of a Mormon Literature," *Dialogue* 4.3 (Autumn 1969) 13-20.

31. *JI* 17 (15 Feb 1882) 54; quoted in Flake 66.

32. In *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber, 1935, 1962), John Macmurray wrote that the function of art is the "education of our sensibility," which he views as essential to moral judgment and action and to enlarging our capacity for joy (see esp. 37-47, 51-54, 67-77). In *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber, 1961, 1970), Macmurray put it succinctly: "The function of art, then—its place in the economy of the personal, and so in action as the determination of the future—is the education and refinement of sensibility. Sensibility is feeling determining an image . . . . In action, this image is 'the image of the end,' as Aristotle said, and as such the representation of the Good as a form" (183-84).

33. *JI* 6 (7 Jan 1871) 4; quoted in Flake 65.

34. Arthur Mizener alludes to this story in "What Makes Great Books Great," in Francis Brown, ed., *Highlights of Modern Literature* (New York: New American Library, 1954) 16-17; cf. Hardin Craig, *Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1958) 313-14.

35. See Plato's *Republic* Books 2-3, 10. I've discussed this "quarrel with the poets" in "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say," in *Sunstone* 16.5 (July 1993) 40-50, esp. 40-43, 45-46; slightly different versions appear in the *Association for Mormon Letters Annual* 1994 1.19-33, and (forthcoming) in Eugene England and Lavina Anderson, eds., *Tending the Garden* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1996). Here, I hope it's clear from my "negative" examples—people imitating "bad" or at best "mixed" characters—that, given the assumption that reading is "imitation" (in the imagination) and leads to "imitation" (in action), I'm constrained to agree with Socrates; but, in "Let the Stranger Say," rather than banish imitative poets, I would question the assumption and would try to replace or modify it with what I try to describe there as "Christian imagination." We are not done untangling the knot of the ethics of reading and the moral effects of fiction.

36. *Inferno* 5.121-138. My reading of the episode derives from the lectures of Giuseppe Mazzotta at Cornell, Spring 1974, though the implications, of course, are obvious enough in the episode itself. See Mazzotta's discussion of Francesca's "desire mediated by literature" in *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979) 165-70, 191.

37. Mizener 20.

38. Photocopy of letter in my possession. The first known reader to "start practicing" the violence she supposes Evenson's book "preaches" is the writer of the letter, who persuaded university administrators sufficiently that she and they have done considerable violence to the author. So far, those are the only reported negative consequences of the book.

39. "A Plea for Fiction" 186; quoted in Clark 14. The most sizable examination and defense, so far, of the Mormon "Home Literature" tradition is Richard H. Cracroft's two-part "Seeking 'the Good, the Pure, the Elevating': A Short History of Mormon Fiction," *Ensign* 11 (June 1981): 56-62; and (July 1981): 56-61.

40. *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, 1970) 47-48.

41. *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), as excerpted in *Selected American Prose: The Realistic Movement, 1841-1900*, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Holt, 1958, 1967) 301. Howells portrayed, among other things, divorce in *A Modern Instance* (1882), shady business dealings in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and riots in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890).

42. Moses 7:28-37.

43. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1938) 137.

44. *Doctrine and Covenants* 88:6; 122:8; Eph. 4:9-10; 3 Ne. 27:14-15.

45. The relevant fragments of the "Story Teller" frame may be found in "Passages from a Relinquished Work" in Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*. My reading of the "Story Teller" draws on seminar discussions with Michael J. Colacurcio at Cornell in 1972; the densely allusive discussion in his *Province of Piety* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 496-515, might challenge even his "ideal audience" of former students, yet even without reading the entire book, it will yield insight and provoke reflection.

## Roughly One of the R's: Some Notes of a BYU Fiction Teacher (with a Pedantry of Endnotes)

B. W. Jorgensen

This will not be professorial, exactly, but it will be both personal and learned, and less exposition and argument than anecdotes and intimations of what I think I've been doing. Imagine it: teaching fiction at the Lord's University.

Or even at Brigham Young's.<sup>1</sup> Some of our forebears—yours if not mine, who were latecoming Scandinavians—might have found it odd, not to say sinister. Brigham himself, though he did allow children could read novels to "add fire to their spirits, improve their minds,"<sup>2</sup> sounds elsewhere grudging at best: "I would rather that persons read novels than read nothing"; and in the same breath he leveled some pretty heavy rhetoric against "trifling, lying" novels.<sup>3</sup> For about the first forty years of Mormondom in Utah, Brigham and others, especially George Q. Cannon acting as field marshal or self-propelled howitzer, waged a stern campaign against the reading of fiction: it was "literary dram-drinking" which would "deaden

the mind," "destroy the memory," "waste valuable time," "warp the imagination," "convey wrong impressions," and "distract the person indulging in it from the important things of life." To become a "novel-reader" was about as bad as the fate worse than death. So some of Cannon's cohorts seem to have been saying.<sup>4</sup>

At least until Orson F. Whitney started boring from within, sloganizing "Home Literature" into being<sup>5</sup> and making the Wasatch Front safe for Nephi Anderson and his epigones, right down to Jack Weyland and Shirley Sealy and the Yorgason brothers.<sup>6</sup> That was the next form the trouble took: the fiction now more or less officially sanctioned was "the good, the pure, the elevating kind," by which Anderson quite clearly meant *only* didactic fiction, with a "message" the author "puts into" it. Coming too easily to a beaten fork in the road, the trivialized dichotomy of overt preaching or teaching vs. frivolous amusement, and overlooking the third path of serious moral imagination, Anderson steered as any earnest person might, and landed us in package/message aesthetics.<sup>7</sup>

And there, as a Henry James hero might asseverate, we are.<sup>8</sup>

\*

And there is about where I and numerous others came in as BYU English majors in the sixties. We learned to lisp Poe's phrase "the heresy of *The Didactic*"<sup>9</sup> and to talk not always clearly about "form and content" and to read stories for their "themes" or even their "meanings" (never their "messages" or, Brooks and Warren forfend,<sup>10</sup> their "morals") and to write analytic essays whose ruling principle was "theme": Symbol and Theme in "Araby"; Point of View as Theme in "Flowering Judas"; Plot and Theme in "Barn Burning"; Something and Theme in Practically Anything.

BYU students are traditionally impervious to irony, unless it pounces toothed and clawed as sarcasm; it took a while to notice something funny here.

\*

Some of the "Chicago critics" like Wayne Booth and Sheldon Sacks and Norman Friedman, who seem to have learned some useful things from Aristotle, helped me begin to sort this out.<sup>11</sup> To read all works of fiction, all stories, as if they "exemplified" or "illustrated" or "embodied" (take your pick) "themes" does help organize your five-page essays, but it makes the curious presumption (which Nephi Anderson emphatically did not make) that all stories have the same *telos*, the same end, purpose, or "final cause." Dubious, dubious—even if we're talking about what we call "serious" fiction: to propound a worthy religious, philosophical, or moral idea may not be the only way to be "serious." Just suppose, a fledgling Aristotelian might say, just suppose a story aims not necessarily to *teach* you anything but rather to *please* you in a simple or complicated way, to *move* you by engaging you in the life of imagined persons whose happiness or misery you care about.

Consider, I often say in class, that a story might *educate* you without being *didactic*, without *trying to teach* you.<sup>12</sup> After all, you're built to learn, among other things. And your experience seldom feels palpably designed to impart lessons; the mind that gets only "lessons" from experience, illustrations of general truths, paper cutouts for a flannelboard in junior primary, may have missed the knowledge that experience is;<sup>13</sup> and just about for sure has missed the grain and tang and singular stink of "things as they are."<sup>14</sup> To experience, after all, means to be tried, tested, risked by going out among perils, passing fearfully through.<sup>15</sup> Generality and abstraction,

withdrawn-ness, might be a way not to go. Stories, most of us suppose, are verbal figures of possible, imagined experience. A story might lead you out of where you are and into somewhere else, but its way and its end could be pleasure, could be delight. "For heaven forbid," says Eudora Welty, "we should feel disgrace in seeking understanding by way of pleasure."<sup>16</sup>

"It feels so good not to be trammelled," Joseph Smith said.<sup>17</sup> This simple theoretical move turns out to be untrammelling in one way I hadn't expected. I just wanted to unbind the burdens of teaching and preaching from a lot of stories that looked meant for other ends, for dirge or dance. Stories like Chekhov's "My Life" or Miss Welty's "At the Landing" and "The Wide Net"—or her "Worn Path," dirge and dance in one. But it also sets the didactic stories free in their difference, lets us admire them as what they are, lets us know their powers. Stories like Stephen Crane's "Open Boat," Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilych" (the story that told me I belonged to fiction for life), and Hemingway's "Clean, Well-Lighted Place." The complex pleasure of knowing how well you've been taught.

\*

So this became Thing One in my classes (in The Short Story, in fiction units in Fund of Lit and Crit which I save till last like dessert or the tenderest morsel of porkchop): the restoration of one good thing: the pleasurable knowing of experience. It's subversive, and it makes for some odd, almost schizzy moves and countermoves in class. I didn't quite see this until one time an interested and puzzled student asked the right question (I always tell them, I write it into every syllabus: the only dumb question is the one that doesn't get a voice; and sometimes they believe me). Yes, I said, I'm trying to teach you some useful theory and history of the short story,

some systematic ways of thinking and talking about stories. And I'm telling you the best and maybe only reason to read stories is to enjoy them. I'm a double agent: serving the institution of literature by theory and method and tunneling under its walls for joy.

Walker Percy suggests that English lit class is about the last place on earth a student has a chance to "get at" a Shakespeare sonnet,<sup>18</sup> and I suspect he's right. Alas, here we are in class. Write that down; it's a little poem.

\*

So I try to teach the skill of interpretation—part, I suspect, of what Emily Dickinson called "the skill of life"<sup>19</sup>—by way of Vladimir Nabokov's delicious maxim, "Fondle details."<sup>20</sup> I test how well students learn to fondle details, how well they can trace continuities between this discreetly sleek small part and the whole live and un-outguessable animal. Spot passages, to be identified by author and title, brute memory; and then to be commented on in as many ways as you can think of. Are these going to be important details? one student asks; or just obscure little things? Another dumb question getting the right voice; right on. Answer: It depends. Obscure if you haven't read the story fondly enough. How about "He was reading again"? Or "There was a watermelon on the table"? If you haven't lingered over those quiet, out-of-context-how-uninterestingly- plain little pebbles, you don't know how to read Heming-way and Chekhov well enough to get an A.<sup>21</sup> But this is a General Education course. Right.

We get better at fondling and we find some pretty nice things. One day somebody asks what about this scarecrow Old Phoenix first takes for a ghost—"Who be you the ghost of? For I have heard of nary death close by"—then knows by touch for what it is, and at last joins in its "ragged dancing in the

wind": "Dance, old scarecrow, . . . while I dancing with you." We're taking a closer look; here it is: when she reaches out, she finds "a coat, and inside that an emptiness, cold as ice."<sup>22</sup> Death. This old lady's power of life, power of love, joy, is so much she dances with death. Death and the granny. If you thought the "theme" of "A Worn Path" was "charity" (and no mistake, Phoenix has that, and the nurse says it twice near the end so we can't miss it)—if you thought that, think some more. There's something larger here, and it has no name easier or shorter or less particular than the whole story. Yeats had said a part of it his own way in "Sailing to Byzantium":

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress.<sup>23</sup>

And you can bet Miss Welty knew that poem.<sup>24</sup>

Writing derives from the Adamic art of naming the creatures. Shall we learn to read?

\*

Art, the natural theologian John Macmurray declared, is for "the training of our sensuality"—deliberately choosing a word to make genteel liberal Christian sensibility "recoil."<sup>25</sup> Stories, one kind of verbal art, are the education of our whole human capacity for judging and celebrating, for feeling and thinking about—in the one word, for telling—the possible contours of experience in space and time, bone and sinew and skin, blood breath and brain. Stories have a chance of doing this because they are the work of imagination. And imagination, the good Abbot Isaac of Stella wrote back in the twelfth century, is "intelligence clothed in sensation."<sup>26</sup> How about yours?

I'm with Paul; I want to be further "clothed upon."<sup>27</sup> I think Flannery O'Connor was right—fiction is an "incarnational art," not a package with a message inside, certainly not what she called "Instant Uplift."<sup>28</sup> And I'm starting to wonder if imagination may not just be intelligence rejoicing in its living body.

\*

I sometimes say mildly outrageous things. Like: history is fiction, and smart historians know it. *Fiction* means *something made*, as contrasted to something done, a fact. Whatever happened happened; was actual; was coming-to-pass, passing, past, done gone like that. Words about it are words after the fact and never quite catching it. The historian makes a story in words; the main difference between him and Tolstoy (aside from Tolstoy's craft as a writer) is his stricter allegiance to whatever is left over from what happened—oral testimony if he's lucky in one way, records and relics if lucky in another way. Mostly fictions either way. History is fiction that is loyal to the fictions it has received and has tested against other kinds of evidence and against the rules of evidence; tested enough to trust. I said something like that several years ago and one bright student got exasperated I guess and checked out of the class. He had my number, he got it from Cannon & Co.: history is truth; fiction is a pack of lies.

It is also disquietingly like other unsavory business: gossip, window-peeping. I admit this out loud one day in a fiction-writing class and keep thinking about it, sleeping on it. Next morning I say it another, nicer way: fiction is like the kindly knowledge of the angels.

\*

I'm up to more than subversions, I like to think. Thing Zero, the thing I want to float like a smoke ring steadily

violating the Second Law over every class session, is Why: why do we human beings tell and heed stories?

Lady Murasaki's Prince Genji had one answer:

The storyteller's own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill—not only what he has passed through himself, but even events which he has only witnessed or been told of—has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it.<sup>29</sup>

To remember and know. In one of his essays Guy Davenport reminds us that the hugest remembrancer of our century, Marcel Proust, needed to perform that stupendous act of memory and fiction *À la recherche du temps perdu* in order not to "exist in a world of devastating blankness."<sup>30</sup> To have a world at all.

Another answer, sort of: our contemporary the American novelist Reynolds Price has been so audacious as to assert that:

A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *homo sapiens*—second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our days' events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths.<sup>31</sup>

That's staggering, but I believe it. Like the White Queen in Looking-Glass Land, I can believe "as many as six impossible things before breakfast,"<sup>32</sup> and this one's possible. It does take imagination.

Here's another sort-of answer I like: Elie Wiesel retells it (better than I can) as the multi-page epigraph to his novel *The Gates of the Forest*. The founder of Hasidism, the great rabbi

Israel Baal Shem-Tov, when the people were threatened with calamity, used to go into the forest to a certain place and there meditate, then light a fire in a special way and say a special prayer; and God would turn calamity aside. Generations later (I'm skipping, and this spoils the pleasurable way of the tale) the task fell to his successor Israel of Rishyn. But he could only sit in his study in his armchair with his head in his hands and explain to God how there was no fire, he could recall no prayer, he could not even find his way to the place in the forest. "All I can do," he would say, "is tell the story, and this must be sufficient."

And it was sufficient.

God made man because he loves stories.<sup>33</sup>

And I thought I was sometimes outrageous.

\*

Sometimes I do pose the question in my own maybe outrageous way: Why does God tell stories? Or if that bothers you—it doesn't bother me—then: Why do his witnesses?

And like any prof prepping for class, I've scrawled out versions of an answer. Here is one, as good as I can make it now, a little abashed to come after Genji and Price and Wiesel, a little more to be uttered in the same long breath with sentences from Hemingway, Chekhov, and Welty:

Stories are how we figure our life as action. Stories are that we might know our experience by means of words—our experience of the world, perhaps finally of the Word. Stories matter to children and adults, to human beings, children of God, because we take ourselves as personal agents choosing our way among oppositions through time; because we take our life as a story God imagined and even now shapes and finishes with our help, to whatever ends we choose.

This is some of what I do, some of my time; and rather more of what for.

## Notes

1. See Eugene England's essay, "Becoming Brigham Young's University," in *On the Lord's Errand* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1985) 25-36; and his earlier Honors Banquet Address, "Brigham Young's University and the Music of Hope," *BYU Today*, October 1983, reprinted in his *Why the Church Is As True As the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986) 79-92; behind England, Hugh Nibley's "Educating the Saints: A Brigham Young Mosaic," *BYU Studies* 11 (Autumn 1970) 61-87, collected in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1978) 229-260. Both stress the strenuous liberality and openness of Brigham Young's ideal education and do not mention his equally well-documented antipathy to fiction—which is, to be sure, only a part of the whole picture.

2. See his "Organization and Development of Man," *Journal of Discourses* 2.94 (1853) (subsequently cited as JD).

3. JD 9.173 (1862). Stephen Kent Ehat's article on this subject, "How to Condemn Noxious Novels, by Brigham Young," *Century* 2 1.4 (Dec 1976) 36-48, is thorough, entertaining, and copiously illustrated with period graphics and quotations.

4. Useful samplings of Mormon anti-fiction rhetoric in the period 1850-88 may be found in two BYU master's theses: Gean Clark, "A Survey of Early Mormon Fiction" (M.A. 1935), esp. 9-13; and Lawrence R. Flake, "The Development of the Juvenile Instructor under George Q. Cannon . . ." (M.R.E. 1969), ch. 6. The phrases quoted here come respectively from Clark 11 and Flake 60, the latter series (altered slightly to fit my syntax) from a piece in *Juvenile Instructor* 16 (15 Apr 1881) 115.

I have examined the American literary context of these and other censures of "novel-reading" in "Heritage of Hostility: The Mormon Attack on Fiction in the 19th Century." Not at all original in the Mormon tradition, this sort of rhetoric is at least as old as the U. S. Constitution (see G. H. Orians, "Censure of Fiction in American Romances and Magazines," *PMLA* 52 [1937] 195-214) and can be found in letters of Thomas Jefferson and Washington Irving, as well as in various sermons

and tracts from the first decades of the nineteenth century; for samplings, see Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1961) 67; Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 10-14; and Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel, 1793-1903* (New York: New York UP, 1983, 1985) 4.

Taking a too-narrow view of it, perhaps the strongest piece of anti-fiction rhetoric in the 19th century is Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Poor Emma—if only she had heard and heeded the proper counsel and not read all those trashy novels!

5. See his address by that title, first printed in *Contributor* (1888), then published in his *Poetical Works* (1889), and reprinted in *A Believing People*, ed. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert (Provo: Brigham Young UP, 1974) 203-07. Some sense of the history of "Home Literature" since c. 1890 can be gained from Richard H. Cracroft's two-part article, "Seeking 'the Good, the Pure, the Elevating': A Short History of Mormon Fiction," *Ensign* 11 (June 1981) 56-62, and (July 1981) 56-61; and from Eugene England's "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years" in *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective*, ed. Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry (Midvale, UT: Signature, 1983) 95-146; a shorter version of England's article appears in *BYU Studies* 22.2 (Spring 1982) 131-60. My own essays, "Digging the Foundation: Making and Reading Mormon Literature," *Dialogue* 9.4 (Winter 1974) 50-61, and "Element and Glory: Reflections and Speculations on the Mormon Verbal Imagination," *Proceedings of the Symposia of the Association for Mormon Letters 1978-1979* (Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1979) 65-77, go over some of the same ground.

6. For whom I am (and for whose wife my wife is) sometimes mistaken.

7. See his "A Plea for Fiction" and "Purpose in Fiction," *Improvement Era* 1 (1898) 186-88, 269-71.

8. The contemporary terrain of "Home Literature" is surveyed by Pamela Gillie Carson and Lavina Fielding Anderson in their four-part article, "Mormon Mushies," *Sunstone Review* 2.7 (Jul 1982) 30-32; 2.8

(Aug 1982) 23-24, 35; 2.9 (Sep 1982) 25-27; 2.10 (Oct 1982) 20-21, 25. In one very real sense—that of being published mainly within the Mormon community by presses whose market comprises mostly church members—the more “serious” fiction of writers like Eileen Kump, Donald Marshall, Levi Peterson, Bela Petsco, Linda Sillitoe, Douglas Thayer, Larry Morris, Michael Fillerup, Margaret Young, and others also belongs to “Home Literature,” and might be thought to lend the category some dignity.

9. “The Poetic Principle” (1848), reprinted in *Introduction to Poe*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1967) 456.

10. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton, 1959) 272-74, 277-78.

11. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961; rev. ed. 1983), and “How Not to Use Aristotle: The Poetics” and “How to Use Aristotle” in *Now Don’t Try to Reason with Me*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970) 103-115, 117-129; Norman Friedman, *Form and Meaning in Fiction* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1975), esp. ch. 6, “Mimetic and Didactic” (102-22); Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964), especially ch. 1, “Toward a Grammar of the Types of Fiction” (1-69). Behind them all, of course: Aristotle’s *Poetics*, of which the most useful edition for students of literature may still be the one translated by Leon Golden with commentary by O. B. Hardison (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

12. Wayne Booth, in *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), might seem to erase the distinction I appeal to here, between “didactic” and “mimetic” fiction, when he asserts that “all narratives are ‘didactic’” (151); but the assertion is part of his project of “ethical criticism,” and even as he asserts that all stories employ and convey “values,” he also acknowledges that readers can have both “didactic” and “aesthetic” experiences with stories; further, he nowhere dismantles the arguments of Friedman and others about the “formal” and “final” differences between stories with “didactic” and “mimetic” ends (see esp. 13, 151-53). I think Booth means more or less what I mean when I say that any story may instruct us, or that stories may “educate” us (“lead” us “out” of where we are toward somewhere else) without being (“formally” and “finally”) “didactic.”

13. I have in mind, minimally and pedantically, Kant’s sense of “experience” as “that knowlege [made] possible” by the union of “the concepts of the understanding” with “sensible intuition” in *Critique of Practical Reason*, Part I, Book I, Chapter I.1, “Of the Deduction of the Fundamental Principles of Pure Practical Reason.” But anyone who has ever applied for a job requiring “previous experience” knows another equally pertinent sense: abstractions won’t do, only knowhow, living knowledge.

14. D & C 93.24.

15. This definition conflates as many senses as it can of the Indo-European root *per*<sup>1</sup> and its derivatives, especially under *per*<sup>3</sup>, as these are described in the Appendix to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1st or 3rd editions).

16. See her essay “The Reading and Writing of Short Stories” (1949) as reprinted in *Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E. May (Athens, OH: Ohio U. Press, 1976) 162; the severely cut version of this essay reprinted as “Looking at Short Stories” in Welty’s *The Eye of the Story* (New York: Random, 1978) does not include the passage quoted.

17. In a general conference of the Church, 8 April 1843; see DHC 5.340. Alluding to the recent high council censure of Pelatiah Brown for teaching personal interpretations of the Apocalypse, he had in mind the trammels of orthodoxies other than the literary; but orthodoxies tend to influence literature, as George Orwell saw and said: “Orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style” (“Politics and the English Language,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 4, *In Front of Your Nose* [New York: Harcourt, 1968] 135). What orthodoxy wants, orthodoxy may not get. Still, how this comports with the capability for “severe orthodoxies” (England, “Dawning” 127, reversing Virginia Sorensen, “Is it True?—The Novelist and His Materials,” *Western Humanities Review* 7 [1953] 285) that some may wish to see as defining a genuine “Mormon writer” is a problem for Mormon writers and critics to work out. Doubtless in fear and trembling. Where would we be without ortho? Just here with our doxies—a fine fix.

18. See "The Loss of the Creature" in his *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, 1975) 56-7.
19. The phrase occurs in a letter of 1873 to her cousins Louise and Fanny Norcross, Letter 388 in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958) 2.504.
20. I first read this in Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987) 239, but have since located it in Nabokov's "Good Readers and Good Writers" in his *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1980) 1.
21. The sentences come from Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," from *In Our Time* (New York: Scribner, 1925) 121; and Chekhov's "The Lady with the Pet Dog," as translated by Avrahm Yarmolinsky in *The Portable Chekhov* (New York: Viking, 1947, 1968) 417.
22. "A Worn Path," in *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (New York: Harcourt, 1980) 144.
23. *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 191.
24. It's a sucker bet for the other guy. Welty's titling her fifth book *The Golden Apples* (New York: Harcourt, 1949) is a strong indicator: the title comes from Yeats's early "Song of Wandering Aengus" (1897), which may be well-met in a musical setting by the folksinger Judy Collins, as "Golden Apples of the Sun" on her album of the same title (Elektra EKS 7222, 1962) and re-released on *So Early in the Spring* (Elektra 8E-6002, 1977). Better, Miss Welty has testified in *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983; New York: Warner, 1985) that the experience recounted by a male character in her story "No Place for You, My Love"—"I read 'Sailing to Byzantium,' standing up in the stacks" at the University of Wisconsin—"had indeed been [her] own" (88).
25. *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber, 1935, 1962) 37-38; cf. 58-60.
26. I first read this in Virginia Sorensen's Mormon novel, *Many Heavens* (New York: Harcourt, 1954) 39-40, where it is misdated (apparently by the source Sorensen's character reads) to 1080. According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Isaac lived c. 1100-c. 1169, and held that the union of soul and body was in imagination. Isaac's "Epistle on the Soul," PL 194: 1875B-1890A, is on my reading list.
27. 2 Cor. 5.2-4.
28. *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, 1970) 68, 165.
29. I've seen this quoted in two places—George P. Elliott's long "Defense of Fiction," *Hudson Review* 16.1 (Spring 1963) 9-48, also published as an Introduction to his anthology *Types of Prose Fiction* (New York: Random, 1964) 8; and Reynolds Price's essay "Dodging Apples" in his *Things Themselves* (New York: Atheneum, 1972) 22, and *A Common Room* (New York: Atheneum, 1987) 195. It comes from Arthur Waley's translation of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Random, 1960) 501; I have preferred the more recent translation of Hugh Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1976), in which the passage occurs, in rather different language but with the same gist, on p. 437; but I have not yet traveled that far in either translation.
30. "From Indifference to Attention," *New York Times Book Review* 4 April 1982: 30.
31. "A Single Meaning: Notes on the Origins and Life of Narrative," in *A Palpable God* (New York: Atheneum, 1978; San Francisco: North Point, 1986) 3; also reprinted in *A Common Room* (New York: Atheneum, 1987) 243.
32. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), ch. 5.
33. *The Gates of the Forest* (New York: Shocken, 1982). Stanley Elkin's last pages (143-48) in *The Living End* (New York: Dutton, 1979) seem, apocalyptically and rather more ironically, to agree.

## Slow Dance No. 1084

Unhinged he looked at her.

Clenched jaw working like a throbbing naked heart  
she scrubbed the carrot till its  
flesh glistened raw,  
stripped of bitter gritty skin,  
then slammed it down  
took up the knife  
and slashed the thing into a dozen startled discs.

“She’ll get her finger,” he thought  
(half hoped)  
amazed as always at the violence of her silence.

His mind gaped open  
raced, reviewed  
what done? not done?  
Then closed again, outspent.

One hand crept out  
tentative, testing  
and fingers tip-toed on her sleeve.  
She jerked away—  
then instantly contrite

turned back to see his altered eyes.  
Self-loathing buttressed her perversity  
and yet transposed the rage.

Thick-skinned? percipient? or suddenly moved by  
some primeval instinct known to male alone  
again he reached and touched

She tensed

then yielding more to marriage than to man  
she moved into his arms  
and reaching high  
placed hers about his neck.  
And forgetting in a breath  
the heaviness of the still damp blade  
now pendent down his back  
they moved in rhythmic slow dance  
across the time-worn tile.

—*Sharlee Mullins Glenn*

---

Sharlee Mullins Glen teaches writing for the Honors Department at Brigham Young University. She lives in Pleasant Grove, Utah, with her husband, four children, a dog, a bunny, and a parakeet named Perky.

## Book Reviews

*All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Emma Lou Thayne (Aspen Books, 1995, Hard cover \$14.95). This is the type of book that you want to cuddle up to with an old afghan and a cup of tea (oh, all right, a cup of cocoa). Reading the mixture of essays and poetry by Ulrich and Thayne is a lot like looking over their shoulders, at their friendship and at their individual lives. Both writers can be funny and light-hearted as well as thought-provoking and insightful. Their subjects range from (trivial) everyday activities to the deeper issues of faith. I found myself laughing out loud, crying real, wet tears and nodding my head in affirmation; but at times, I also felt a bit tired by the authors' energy, a bit annoyed by their self-centered approach and a bit skeptical of their unfailing optimism. Rather than one long pleasant evening; it's more enjoyable to absorb at several short sittings.

—Julia Z. Konopasek

*Statehood* by Marilyn Brown (Aspen Book, 1995, Hard cover 322 p., \$9.95). Although Utah's approaching status as a state serves as the background for this novel, the title is somewhat of a misnomer. This coming of age story about a young Boston journalist sent to Salt Lake City on the eve of statehood is told in language that rings with clarity and

authenticity. Brown captures the time, the attitudes and the voices with such skill that the reader easily slips into the protagonist's dilemma: at once liking the Mormons and feeling completely baffled by them. Ultimately, however, Brown sells out to the Mormon culture; she confines her art to the boundaries of a proper Mormon conclusion as the impossible love story, now conveniently a conversion story, is easily resolved by the woman's death. I certainly wish that Brown had been faithful to her own characters.

—Julia Z. Konopasek

*Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* by Terry Tempest Williams (Random House, 1995, Hard cover, 62 p., \$17.00) *Desert Quartet* is a disappointment for expectant readers. In it, we listen to Williams explore sexuality and sensuality with the four elements earth, water, fire, and air. Although there are passages that are vintage Williams, lyrical and poetic, the book as a whole does not draw the reader in. Her eco-erotica is too much a stretch. For example, when in the desert Williams builds a fire, she stands over it nude and lets herself be "ravished" by it, becoming singed. A little over the top, perhaps (do not try this at home!). The book is illustrated by Mary Frank, however, and her captivating art carries one along. Indeed, the book would have worked better if Williams had written brief passages to accompany Frank's drawings rather than the other way around.

—Kaydean McInnis